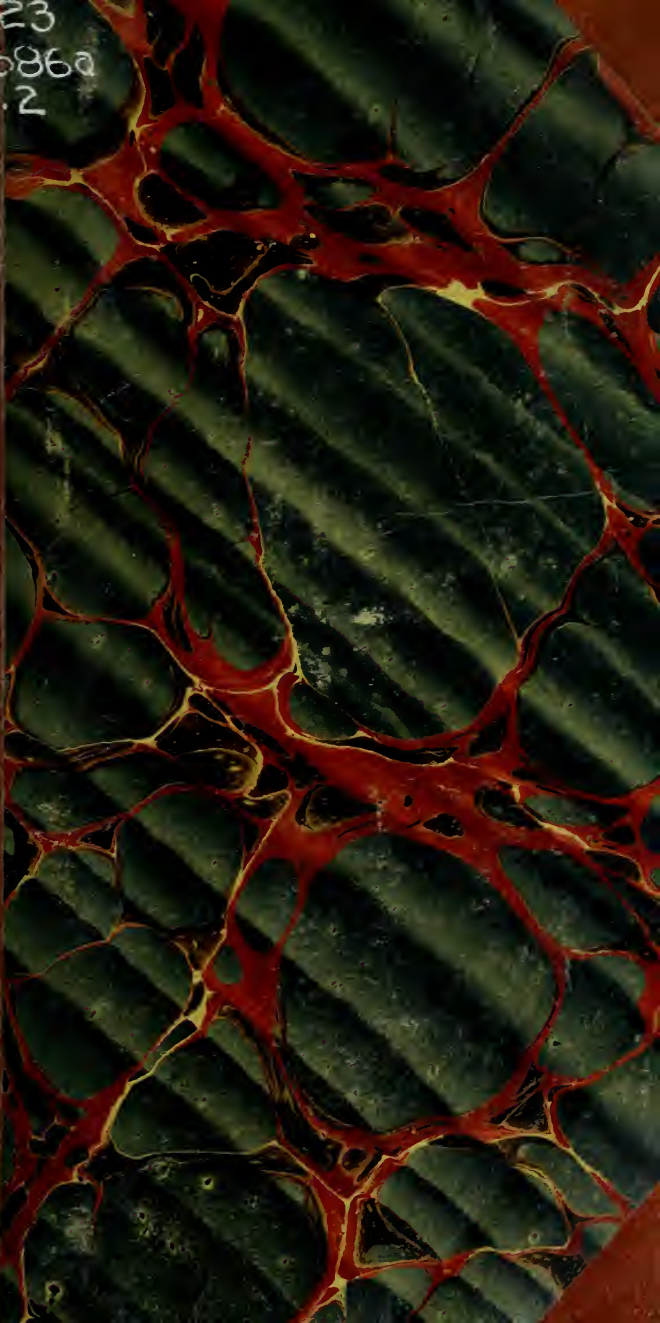
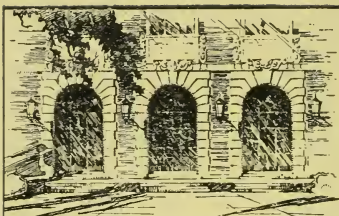


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ARDENT;
A TALE OF WINDSOR FOREST,

IN THE

Nineteenth Century.

DEDICATED TO THE MEMORY OF HIS MOST GRACIOUS
MAJESTY,

GEORGE THE FOURTH.

IN FOUR VOLUMES.

“ The great business of all is virtue and wisdom.”

Page 306 of Locke's 14th Edition on Education.

VOL. II.

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ARDENT;

A TALE OF WINDSOR FOREST.

CHAPTER I.

DURING the period of the fair lady's indisposition, Ardent's mind was ill at ease; he frequently revolved the conversation he had held with his mother respecting his engagement with his fair patient; he felt convinced of the truth of his mother's objections, yet could not divest himself of his tender regard and attachment to the lady; and with these sentiments in favour of the bewitching object, as well as the respect he entertained for his mother's opinions, he felt perplexed and harassed how to steer his conduct upon the occasion. To disclose his embarrassing situation to his fair idol, in her present state of languor and indisposition, he felt would be cruel and unjustifiable; indeed, he dreaded her

wounded feelings and indignation when she should learn the particulars of what she must consider surprising and unlooked for ; he resolved, therefore, to say nothing upon so delicate a subject, till the lady was restored to perfect health. The time at length arrived when that desirable and yet dreaded period approached, and during one of their conversations the lady asked him if he had seen his mother.

“ Yes, my dear madam, she was with me when the sudden news of your cruel indisposition arrived, which so alarmed me for the blushing honours of your cheek.”

“ You are merry, sir ; but go on.”

“ Thank you, madam, for the permission, for your beauty is a theme which would arouse whatever eloquence I may be possessed of, and I think I could expatiate upon it without intermission from sunrise to sunset ; nay, even after that, and beyond the rising of the moon, until the gayly attired goddess, Aurora, again announced the arrival of her more splendid and fiery brother.”

“ Very fine, Ardent, upon my word ; and by this specimen of your eloquence I shall begin to imagine that the brilliant orb you speak of has set

fire to your imagination, and it is accordingly going off in sky-rocket fashion, up to the god of day."

"No, my dear madam, it has no occasion for so high a flight for indulging its gratification in the admiration of what is beautiful; for what eye that now beholds your lovely countenance could be so unconscionable as to think of roaming in quest of more superlative loveliness, in which search it must meet with disappointment? For where could a face of such inimitable beauty be found? Those features, modelled according to the nicest rules of perfect female excellence; those beautiful eyes, whose brilliance are softened by a kind of delicious and voluptuous languor, and shaded by those long eyelashes, which surpass in beauty the rays of the brightest sunbeams, and which appear to have been strangers to the briny and scalding tears of grief"——

"Have you done, Ardent?"

"Certainly not, madam; if you will permit me to proceed."

"Well, then, I do not; for I think I have had a sufficiency for the present: and so, Mr. Extravagance, we will defer a farther specimen of

your flights of fancy till we experience a greater dearth of more important conversation. And now tell me if you informed your mother of the affair we were speaking of previous to her arrival, for you have been strangely silent on the subject to me. Do you think I am an uninterested party, that you have forborne to tell me the result of your communication? But, as I assure you I am not, I shall expect, without further delay, you will let me hear the whole particulars."

"Then, dear madam, I will be candid, and however painful the task of imparting so delicate a communication, yet it is better the truth should be known, for I detest falsehood or concealment, and am an enemy to mystery of any description."

"Proceed, sir, if you please; for, from the tenor of your preface, I should conceive I have something very unpleasant to hear; therefore, without unnecessarily outraging my feelings, I request you will come to the point at once."

"Dearest lady, do not be offended with me, for I prize you too dearly to endure your displeasure with any degree of tranquillity. My mother's opinion is unfortunately too much at variance with my inclination; and when she was

informed of what I must still consider your generous sentiments towards me, she appeared distressed, and informed me that my father and herself had set their hearts upon my union with the young lady of their choice, and that any obstacle to that union they would sincerely regret. But, at the same time, my mother could not but feel grateful for your kind interest in my behalf, although it did not alter her preconceived opinion of the extreme eligibility of the other lady in point of age, &c."

"I will not trouble you to proceed farther, Ardent, your last words are sufficiently wounding without any other specimen. I foresaw something unpleasant from your officious communication with your mother; and you know how averse I was to your imparting the affair to her. I foresaw that the cool calculations of the matron would not accord with the warm and natural suggestions of the heart. Leave me for the present, I am too disturbed to continue so unpleasing a conversation; and if you have any feeling remaining, you must now be aware that you have acted very wrong in suffering this delicate affair to escape beyond the precincts of your own bosom."

“ Nay, dearest madam, permit me to”——

“ No, Ardent ; I will hear of no further argument at present : so now leave me to my painful reflections on my own too precipitate folly and your ingratitude.”

With that Ardent took his leave, much distressed at the pain he had given her by his unpleasant disclosure, and thinking she looked more interesting than ever.

CHAPTER II.

AFTER the denouement of the beforementioned embarrassing disclosure, the visits of Ardent to the house of this modern Armida were by no means less frequent,—on the contrary, they were rather increased; but they were not on the same footing as heretofore, for shortly after that eventful period, all was changed, and the youthful lover, in the height of his delirium and intoxication, thought that no sacrifice would be too great to make to the charming object who had sacrificed her spotless innocence for him. Therefore, under the impression of such boundless obligations, he abandoned all idea of the young lady whom his father had selected as the chosen shrine of that homage and attention which he was now so liberally and abundantly bestowing on another.

Indeed, all sense of propriety and reflection had for the present vanished, and their places were occupied by an excited state of voluptuous delusion; all restraint towards each other in

their *tête-a-têtes* was forgotten, and the lady shone forth at those times as one of the frailest daughters of Eve ; all her sanctity, piety, and charity, were then deferred, and her whole thoughts were centered in fixing the silly bird she had caught, by making his prison as captivating as possible. It is true, when Ardent allowed himself a few moments to reflect on what was past, he felt surprised and astonished at what he considered his superlative good luck ; for he had not dared to contemplate even in imagination such a termination of the lady's platonic affections in his favour ; and although he scarcely gave belief to his senses, and thought he was labouring under the delusion of a dream, yet he continued to receive too strong proofs of its reality, and his ignorance of the world led him to conclude that he was the most favoured mortal in it ; and as his divine paragon of perfections had yielded him the last proof of her friendship, he was bound in honour to keep her secret, and not unveil her conduct to that world whose tongue was too ready to assail her character, even on bare suspicion. His life continued to pass on for some time in a sort of intoxicating round of delirium ; his

principles, although shook, were not exactly overthrown, but he gave strong proofs of his folly in persisting still to believe Mrs. Freelove to be an amiable and virtuous woman; and such was the infatuation of his thoughts, that he would not allow himself to think that her intimacy with himself was actually immoral or of a vicious tendency; for such is the force of self-love, that it blinds the perception of those possessing it, and that which would be thought immoral in another is passed over in themselves as a venial trespass on morality; and he thought the present little dereliction of principle could be rectified at any time by marriage, but whether that marriage took place a little before or a little after, was not very material. The imprudence she had committed he attributed to her excessive regard for him, and although it was an indiscretion, yet he chose to pass it over as one of those accidents of life that will occasionally happen, and which cannot be sufficiently or satisfactorily accounted for. But, during his ruminations, he never entertained the idea of a possibility that the woman who could so easily sacrifice herself to one man, who had not used any artifice for her seduction, would, upon a

fitting opportunity, as readily yield herself to another ; and he naturally conceived, as he loved her and her alone, that her regard was also limited to him : a bare suspicion of the contrary would to him have been perfect agony. So sensitive were his feelings in that particular, for such was his delusion and credulity, and so strong were the infatuating charms by which he was bound, that nothing short of the most violent shocks of conscience, or the arousing pangs of jealousy, could dissolve an intimacy so artfully begun under the disguise of religion and semblance of virtue, which was confirmed by an intercourse so dexterously managed as to throw the blame and responsibility upon the more innocent party.

Thus had Ardent sat himself down in fool's paradise, and fondly considered himself as one of the happiest beings in it.

CHAPTER III.

DURING the impetuosity and extravagancy of our hero's infatuation, his visits were incessant at the residence of his fair inamorata—the empress of his affections—the pious recluse—the lovely retired widow—and, above all, the pious nun, whose house was a convent of penitence and abstinence from the lusts of the flesh and the pride of life. All these appellations she sustained with admirable ease, but the last particularly pleased her, as it seemed to impose the necessity of at least an occasional restraint from the sins and vanities of this world; for such was the strange inconsistency of this strangely variable woman, that sometimes she was lively and gay, at others serious and sad—the slave or prey of her passions, whether of gayety or despondency; sometimes torturing herself with apprehensions of the next world, at others, the amorous voluptuary of this. In short, the sinner and the saint were so strangely blended, that at times it was

almost impossible to discover whether it proceeded most from art or insanity. Her vagaries were so extraordinary as frequently to surprise Ardent: but the readers shall judge for themselves by a perusal of one of those motley conversations which sometimes took place between these lovers.

“As the morning is so fine, Ardent, I think we shall do well to repair to what you have termed one of the bowers of felicity, adjoining the laurel-walk; in that shady recess or arbour we may converse without interruption, for, to be serious, I have a long conversation to hold with you.”

“Dear madam, you know I am your most devoted admirer, and I am sure any thing you say must be of a pleasing nature; and as the umbrageous spot you have chosen will afford us a pleasing retreat, I am ready to accompany you immediately into the sylvan world, and there listen to the melody of your voice.”

So saying, the lovers retired to the spot the lady had chosen, where, being seated in an alcove, she thus began to address her attentive lover.

“I believe you are aware, Ardent, that there are many parts in your character that I have

often contemplated with sincere admiration—to a great deal of good-nature you possess an enthusiasm in the cause of virtue, honour, and religion, that is equalled by few at your age. Oh, that my son was as capable of being governed as you are, and would attend to my wishes! How happy I should be; but, alas! I fear his wildness and dissipation will some time or other be the cause of my death.”

“Nay, Mrs. Freelove, you should remember the old axiom, which says, ‘Hope the best and guard against the worst.’ His guardian should watch over him, and, by a frequent correspondence with him, develop his principles; then, should he detect any impropriety of conduct or laxity of principle (such as our own, for instance—I am only speaking by the way), he should check it in the bud, and not suffer it to blossom forth, to the corruption of himself and others; passing his manhood in acts of depravity, and his old age in grief. Such is my counsel, although, I fear, it is directly opposite to what I am now practising; for so powerful are your fascinations, that they have gained a march over my principles, although my better judgment condemns the im-

propriety. And this kind of dereliction from morality, from some letters I have lately received, I apprehend your son is following at a much earlier age than my own, and if not timely prevented, will eventually terminate in his ruin. You will doubtless endeavour all that lies in your power to check his evil propensities in the beginning, lest he may involve you in the vortex of his calamity, and bring down upon you indescribable sorrow and anguish. Perhaps, by a watchful vigilance on your part, as well as on the part of his guardian, there may be yet an opportunity of erasing those errors from his mind before they finally corrupt the heart. ‘Bend the plant while young in the direction you would have it take,’ is an old adage, and not the worse for its antiquity; such monitory vigilance is sometimes the safeguard of morals. But, perhaps, he may be under the influence of powerful attractions, like myself; if so, I am unable to judge of the event, as I am still playing with Cupid at blindman’s buff.”

“Say no more, Ardent, on that subject, for I am resolved to reform, and so shall you; indeed, we must reform, for my life is very uneasy on that

account, and often such gloomy forebodings arise in my mind through my acquaintance with you, that I feel truly wretched—and I then fancy that, some time or other, you will cause my death ; for, oh ! Ardent, you know not all, and when you do you will spurn me from you, and say that I have deceived and bewitched you, and, in fine, have caused your ruin as well as my own. You will then repent you did not marry the young lady who was chosen for you by your father, and reproach me as the cause of your neglecting his counsel. Therefore, Ardent, we will reform ere it is too late, and if we cannot cease to love each other, we will marry and consecrate our union.”

“ Ah, dear madam, I dare not think of my own affairs at present, lest they should arouse feelings too painful to be borne with ; therefore, we will resume the discussion of your son’s, although my own, unfortunately, bears too strong a resemblance to them. And this conversation induces me to disclose to you a circumstance which I should otherwise have concealed. Before the commencement of the delightful, but, I fear, delusive part of our acquaintance, your son applied to me for money, at the same time inform-

ing me of the improper purposes for which he required it: but I believe I have his letter, which will more fully explain the affair.”

“ Read it to me, Ardent ; although I fear its purport will but add to my distress.”

“ I will, dear madam ; first informing you this is not the only application he has made to me, and which I complied with, thinking it was accidental. But, however, I will read you his letter, as the former application was personal, and not alleged for an improper purpose, but merely a loan of a temporary nature.

“ ‘ To — Ardent, Esq.

“ ‘ DEAR SIR,—I am very sorry to be again under the necessity of applying to you, and especially after having been so recently replenished by your favour. I am engaged in an unlucky scrape, having very indiscreetly promised to pay a young woman’s expenses out of Oxfordshire. She is now arrived, and having pledged my word for the fulfilment of that promise, shall deem myself less than a man of honour unless I keep my word unbroken and my promise complete. This I shall not be able to accomplish without your

assistance, unless I pawn my gold watch, seals, &c. But if you will advance, agreeable to request, I shall not be under the necessity of having recourse to such an expedient.

“ ‘ I remain

“ ‘ Your’s truly,

“ ‘ FREELOVE.’

“ This letter, my dear madam, required some consideration, and I reasoned on it in the following manner.—If I do not comply, this young man must forfeit his word or honour, or both ; he has been so indiscreet as to engage in a rash affair, to speak of it in the mildest terms, and must now commit a mean action unless I prevent it. Had the girl not actually arrived, I would have refused his request, considering that, by so doing, I should have proved myself his friend ; and, by reasoning with him on the impropriety of such proceedings, have endeavoured to convince him of the consequences which were likely to result from such indiscreet conduct. Indeed, I was quite shocked to think so young a man should be so forward in folly ; and I dreaded he kept ill company, who had instilled the horrid and destructive idea of

pawning into his mind, as it was an intention unworthy the principles of any gentleman."

"I am distressed, Ardent, beyond every thing; tell me, I beseech you, what reply you made to this shameless and imprudent request."

"I believe, dear madam, I have the copy of my answer, and here it is:—

“ ‘ To — Freelove, Esq.

“ ‘ SIR,—I have complied with your pressing occasions rather than you should forfeit your word as a man of honour, or further disgrace yourself by expedients unworthy of your character as a young gentleman and man of sense—the pretensions to which last I am willing to suppose you have, for a short season only, taken leave of. And allow me to caution you how you pledge your word inconsiderately in future. And, lest I may be encouraging you in the practice of such improper expenditure, I beg leave, in any repetition of the like circumstances, to refer you to your guardian, who must be more likely to know the suitable and proper allowance for so young a man. And now let me advise you, as a friend, to pay the young woman's expenses back to her

friends immediately, as that will be the most honourable, prudent, and economical way of repairing your folly.

“ ‘ I remain

“ ‘ Your well-wishing friend,

“ ‘ R. ARDENT.’ ”

“ I am obliged to you, Ardent, for the considerate kindness you showed my son on this occasion. But how shall I manage this dissipated boy? I really feel exceedingly distressed—tell me, Ardent, how shall I act in this important affair?”

“ I think, my dear madam, the wisest plan would be to write to his guardian, and request that he would endeavour to find out the manner in which his ward passes his time and with whom, whether in the society of men of character, which I fear is very doubtful, or if he is intimate with women, and particularly that unfortunate class, the Cyprians of the street.”

“ Your advice, Ardent, is both serious and proper; and I do not think I can act better than by following it. I feel really grateful for the friendly solicitude you have expressed towards

my son ; and oh, Ardent, how have I repaid this solicitude by my conduct towards you? Would that you and I had never met, for I shall now be accused as the cause of your ruin—your father and friends will curse me, and say I have destroyed your prospects now and hereafter. Oh! I could shed an abundance of tears, both on my own account and yours, as well as my son's. We must all reform,—indeed, we must, or ruin will overtake us ; for how can we expect that God Almighty will prosper our present misdeeds ?”

“ Very praiseworthy resolution, indeed, Mrs. Freelove ; and pray when shall we put such a wise resolve into practice ?”

“ The sooner the better, Ardent, or, if not, you and my son will be the death of me : you, from what you conceive to be a principle of honour and integrity, and my unhappy son from his depravity and want of principle. Both of you will, without actually intending it, assist, although by different ways, to overwhelm me with shame and sorrow, until my destruction is completed. I have for some time past felt a melancholy presentiment that my doom is irrevocably fixed, and Providence will not suffer so unhappy a being as I am long

to incumber the earth; but your destiny, Ardent, will not be so sudden or severe as mine—your character and principles are of that nature that they can only be subdued for a season, while I shall expire from the blows inflicted by you and my son. I do not mean, Ardent, that you will actually beat me—no, no; I am aware that you love me too well for that, and it is that unfortunate love of yours which will prove my ruin. My destruction has already commenced, and my date of death began from the first moment I beheld you; that moment fixed the unalterable decree of Heaven; by your hand I shall fall, and Heaven grant that you may not by mine.”

“Why, madam, you have surely taken leave of your senses—you surpass even yourself in dismal glooms to-day. Pray, from whence did you receive your inspiration? was it from Heaven? Or have you, Cassandra like, taken on you the office of priestess to some oracle, whether Delphic or not? But whoever or whatever the priests may be who have instructed you in their mysteries of nature and religion, heed them not in future, but consider me as the only prophet you should attend to.”

“ You may rally or disbelieve me, Ardent, as you please, but you cannot shake my opinions. The first moment I saw you I became attached to you, but at the same time a strong presentiment came over me that you would be my destruction, and my opinion has varied little since that time ; for the fate you will begin my unhappy son will finish—although, as I before remarked, neither of you are free agents, but instruments of retribution in the hands of Divine Providence. You, Ardent, will destroy me, through a notion of saving others from destruction : but my son will too surely follow up the blow, and finish what you only begin. And believe me, Ardent, or not, a very few years will verify what I now say,—then and then only, will you or others really know anything of me ; until then all will be mystery, and my secret will be concealed until Divine Providence shall order it to be divulged as an example and forewarning to many survivors of the human race, making good spring out of mysterious evil. And the errors of many will possibly be reclaimed or prevented, through the example of you, Ardent, myself, and son.”

“ Why, really, Mrs. Freelove, this is the most

gloomy day we have passed together since the commencement of our acquaintance; for Heaven's sake, let us have no more of these dismals, but endeavour to exert a portion of that reason and common sense which are still inhabitants of our island. And long may they be encircled by our seas, although within their liquid boundary is contained more virtue, more vice, and more religion than is to be met with in any other kingdom. The reason of which I believe to be that the most industry brings the most wealth, and the greatest application the most learning; while learning and industry united, forms the policy of states, or should do. The obtaining of wealth is the stimulus or spring to human activity, and those who direct it best give the strongest proof of wisdom; for wealth is said to engender the most profligacy, as the strongest liquors cause the most obstinate diseases."

"For Heaven's sake, Ardent, where is your imagination wandering to? you are now taking your turn, with a vengeance. And so you consider this rambling discourse about Heaven knows what, as very suitable to arouse me from my state of despondency; but, luckily for me, my

gloomy fit had taken its departure previous to the commencement of your strange harangue, or, on my conscience, I believe it would only have bewildered those faculties which it was intended to lighten. And now, if you please to send your wisdom off as expeditiously as possible after my melancholy, and let us talk of something more entertaining—such as love, for instance. Now, then, I earnestly request you will give me your opinion of that passion—at least, such as it appears to your imagination; and, as I know you are an original, I fancy I shall derive some entertainment from your ideas on the subject. I am aware you have very exalted notions of female charms and female virtue; and the foundation of your moral rectitude would, according to your account, be very difficult to subdue, and I should suppose impracticable, unless by those who have made the science of love their peculiar study.”

“Fair lady, you have changed your mood indeed, and proposed a very fruitful topic of conversation; but, as the last part of your remark seems to glance somewhat towards our own peculiar situation, I must beg permission to discuss that part of the subject first. To begin,

then, with the allusion you have made to my morality, or rather immorality, which I must endeavour to palliate, although I cannot defend; so true do I find it that there is no wisdom below the girdle, yet I believe I may say that no one but yourself would have led me to trespass in the way I have upon the moral virtues."

"You may possibly think so, Ardent; but let me tell you, that although you have good meanings and intentions, yet, from want of experience, you do not know how to direct your judgment to a good purpose. You can give to others that counsel which you yourself are incompetent to follow; and you know not that you are opposed by a principle or power superior to your own. The strong mind governs the weak and the inexperienced—you only reason on what you think should be right, and therefore follow no other current; while those who know the shoals and quicksands of love can guard against them, and those who do not cannot be expected to enter the port of happiness without sometimes being stranded: and this is your present case, for you have, in company with me, struck upon a rock, and I wish with my whole heart we were both well off of it."

“ You carry your notions respecting me, dear madam, too far, for I have nothing to apprehend from common artifice ; for even if I were to fall a martyr to unlawfully indulged affections, it must be after I was first seduced by the semblance they bore to religion and virtue ; then, indeed, by mistaking the shadow for the substance, I may be stranded accordingly. But I think I may venture to hope that those who have neither virtue or religion will consider me as unworthy to exercise their arts upon, especially when no eventual good could be obtained. In fact, I cannot conceive how it is possible that virtue and vice can be inhabitants of the same bosom, unless you and myself may be considered as exceptions to the general rule, for I rather suspect that we unite these opposite principles in our own individual persons ; but then this is owing to accident, and we, you know, are about to rectify the same as soon as possible, either by a discontinuance of our love, which is to be exchanged for pure friendship only, without any further amalgamation of your Platonic system ; or, if we find that too difficult a restraint, we are to legalize and consecrate our misdoings by marriage, by way of

confirming the good principles that predominate in each of us, through the sanction of religion and the laws of our country : and so, in becoming respectable ourselves, set an example worthy of imitation ;—not, indeed, by our first commencement of unlawful pleasures, but in the rectification and making that of a religious character which at present so annoys both of us by the after-reflections of its immorality, and renders our lives miserable, from a knowledge that we are living in a state of sin, which to honest minds is abominable, and, as I fear our good and reverend Dr. Allworthy would say, even damnable and worthy of the wrath of Heaven, if not in this world, at least in the next.”

“ I tell you again, Ardent, that you know not yourself, and let you guard your heart however you will, you will become the dupe, some time or other, to the generosity of your principles ; for it is usually the unsuspecting, who, conscious of their own integrity, are the easiest to be persuaded in the honour and integrity of others, who have long ago relinquished or resigned such principles, as not being subservient to their purpose, and, therefore, only retain a sufficiency of the appear-

ance of them to entangle the more surely and to make uncertainty the more certain.”

“ Heaven grant, madam, that on this occasion your prediction may not be verified. If I am to be seduced to my destruction by any one, it can only be by yourself—and God forbid I should even entertain the notion of your being a profligate—no, no, your character is yet too respectable to allow of your possessing such pestiferous qualities ; which, like those possessed by the basilisk, would destroy the unfortunates on whom it looked. It is true I regard you with almost adoration, but, if I know myself, it is for the bright parts of your character, rather than for its frailties. Your person and wit are certainly attractive, and your good sense occasionally shines forth in a manner that deters me from thinking so vilely of you as your insinuations would lead me to apprehend.”

“ You are very good, Ardent, and think better of me than I deserve ; but when we are married we will each begin a new life, and adhere to the path of virtue ; for with you I may be good and happy, but without you I must be miserable.”

“ I hope, madam, you have entertained a true estimate of our intended happiness ; however,

time will disclose the strength of each other's fortitude in single blessedness: and if our failings are incurable, and cannot be subdued without destroying the peace of each other, there is, luckily, a Scripture remedy we can take, which says, or means to say, "Better marry than do worse." The laws of nature and those of civil society are two distinct things—the first are loose and unrestrained, like those practised by savages in wild life, while the other has the bonds of union, confirmed and cemented by religion. We have tried the one and are both miserable—and why? because we are acting in defiance of the laws of virtue and prudence. And even should we now begin to purify our lives, I fear we should not be happy; for such, I believe, is always the attendant consequence, where the principles of propriety have been once broken down, so difficult is it to retrieve the forfeited opinion of ourselves and of each other."

"Really, Ardent, this assumption of gravity on your part begins to divert me; and I cannot help laughing to see the heroic agony of your formidable virtue, while struggling in the net of Cupid, and conjuring up grim ideas of that for-

midable barrier which separates the sexes at one time and unites them at another. O, consistently inconsistent shackles, that thus restrains and fetters the sons and daughters of men, when Nature, and Nature's God, has bid them both be free, free as air, and the passion that is now so dreaded should alone be consulted. Look around the world for examples: see the Sultan cock feather his favourite hens, view the sparrow on the walls twittering and quivering with amorous delight, and the pigeon cooing to its mate its tales of love, without danger of calumnation; all these follow nature without the interposition or interference of man."

" True, madam, it is nature, but not nature fitted for the purposes of civil life. It may answer the design of Omnipotence for the preservation of the race, and as far as the perpetuation of the species are concerned; but not for the expansion of the mind, which regulates and rules society, admitting greater numbers to be happy, and not suffering mankind to brutalize each other, until the barbaric ages again return to desolate the land and restore our corn-fields to wildernesses. To avert all this dreaded mischief was

the sacred bond of marriage instituted, as it secured happiness to numbers; for marriage is the school of virtue, but concubinage, or a state of nature, is the school of licentiousness and immoral influence over the wild and ungovernable passions of mankind; for he that is not satisfied with one woman, will not be content with twenty. And the same immorality, licentiousness, and want of principle extends to women whose minds are perverted, and whose constitutions usually suffer the consequent effects of a premature decay. To promote numbers, numbers must be free, free in a limited sense, not a licentious one: the licentious sense, as that of concubinage or mistress-keeping, would depopulate the world and eventually make our earth a wilderness. What are the beauties of the earth, such as our parks, our groves, our plantations, our woods and forests of majestic timber, but so many parts of civil life, produced by the hand of man in a state of civil society:—our houses, palaces, churches, castles, all derive their elevation from the same constructive reasoning, or a combination of sentiment and opinion. Multitudes united can improve the face of nature, by extending the attributes of

the Deity to the sons of men ; but disunited they become as savage beasts, and prey upon each other, to the extermination and depopulation of kingdoms—nay, nearly of continents, and, if continued, the world. Thus you see, fair lady, your reasoning is more calculated to produce barbarism than polished manners ; for what have so many suffered martyrdom but in defence of principle, and to prevent the ignorant and the wise receding backwards from the advanced station in society they then held—as in morals, religion, virtue, integrity, principles of upright conduct, and, above all, in the acknowledging of one only true God and his commandments. For what are books written upon religion, morals, and the sciences, but to soften and ameliorate the condition of mankind, and promote the friendly intercourse of one man with another, to lessen human labour, and give to each one that employment his health and condition requires of him, for the benefit of himself, his wife, and his children. As seasons revolve round on their axis, ages do the same, and mankind are progressively advantaged by the activity of all in well-doing. It is by prudent regulations of this kind,

and barriers of principle thus erected, that we are saved from an inundation of vice and immorality, by the wisdom of those men who exceed others in judgment, experience, and sound discretion."

"Then, after your long preamble, Ardent, I am to conclude that marriage is the greatest blessing of civil life, for I know not to what else your long harangue has tended."

"You have, madam, understood me very rightly, for it is indeed the first of all institutions on the civilized globe; for it tells us not to seek for variety, as the licentious part of mankind do, who are spoilers of innocence and depravers of moral principles; it tells us to conform to the laws of God, and unite ourselves one to the other until separated by death. Before man was thus governed, he sought for multitudes, but by this wholesome restraint, which is founded on the law of Nature, happy consequences result to those who strictly observe its ordinances: the child knows his parent, and the parent his child—the mother upon whom she has to look for dependence, and the husband for those consolations that assist to relieve the burdens and troubles of life."

“ All these reasonings, Ardent, may be very correct in a philosophical point of view ; but nevertheless, they do not remove from me the apprehension I entertain of your being indirectly the cause of my death ; they only tend to confirm what I have before expected. But my reasons for forming such notions I must beg leave to be excused from giving more explicitly at the present moment, as it would only tend to make me unhappy and you uncomfortable ; therefore, we will, if you please, change the subject of our conversation. You were talking, Ardent, of the Scripture remedy for love,—it was, as you very well know, “ better marry than burn : ” now, I cannot help laughing at the idea that the pious and reverend fathers in God should have found out such a remedy for the love-sick malady ; and I vow I think their recipe has cured many a one ere now, and, I’ll answer for it, will again—for it is a sovereign remedy indeed, and very congenial to tender sensibilities, which, as I firmly believe, are often crushed by the weight of the chains. Indeed, I am sufficiently an historian to know that the gentle fetters you speak of were typified by the union of our first parents, great-grandpapa

Adam, with great-grandmamma Eve, his better half."

"Let me tell you, Mrs. Freelove, these truths are no jest, and are rather irreverently quoted. I thought we were serious, and yet one of us appears diverging into rather a loose way of talking, sporting, as it were, with the frailties incident to mankind, and ridiculing that portion of virtuous felicity which, you seem to imply, is but in the possession of few. Rather let us commiserate the unfortunate who are entangled in the mazy and bewildering paths of love, and be thankful we are not the most devoted to sorrow and grief."

"Do not repress my mirth, Ardent, for my heart is too much a prey to sadness, and bitterly sighs when none see me, and still less hear me; therefore, I indulge the more willingly, although momentarily, in the thoughtlessness peculiar to my nature and constitution, for I was not always melancholy. Sometimes I fear religion has overclouded my mind with too gloomy a tinge, and almost incapacitates me from fulfilling those duties God and human nature require of me while I

am on earth : so that my chequered life appears to me one tissue of variety and contradiction.”

“ I believe you, madam, and our present conversation has given me sufficient proofs of it, for you are ever varying and ever in extremes ; and such is your peculiar inconsistency, that you do not continue in one mind sufficiently long to be of use to yourself or those you mean to benefit by your good example or counsel. But now, to divert you and give you an assurance that I think most highly of your sex, I will give you a fancied sketch of the character of a virtuous female—at least, as her resemblance is pourtrayed on my creative imagination : enthusiastic you will no doubt think it, and extravagant to a degree bordering on bombast, yet such it appears to me. And the individual from whom the high flight of imagination is derived, was from yourself as I once thought you ; and which now only wants the tenderness of wedded love to think so still, and enhance the enjoyment I derive from your society.”

“ Let me hear it, Ardent, I request ; for if any thing is capable of soothing the anguish of my mind, it is your conversation ; which, though

possessing many eccentric peculiarities, yet I value it on that account, and the more I know of you the better I think of you; but at the same time know, that all this only makes my destruction the more certain."

"Dear madam, I perceive you are either bantering me, or else you are really unhappy; and I cannot relieve you, as the mystery which envelopes you is past my finding out. And, as you will not inform me of what oppresses your heart and mind, I must remain ignorant, and blunder on with my offered kindness, hoping the remedy will overtake the disease—although you yourself say it is incurable. Oh! desperate malady, oh! wretched fate, to seem happy and yet be miserable—to smile in sorrow and be sad in joy—a state of mingled wretchedness and felicity. Oh! unhappy woman, were you of the fairy race who are said to be out of the pale of salvation, your silent grief would then be explicable; but, as it is, what am I to think or what can I offer to soothe your sorrow or to improve your joys? I fear you are one 'that never is, but always to be blessed,' which is much the same thing as being always wretched."

“ I suppose, Ardent, this tantalizing procrastination of your descriptive powers is for the purpose of heightening my expectation : you remind me of bad singers who require great entreaty before they begin their performance. But, if this delay is for the purpose of misleading or mitigating my just criticism, you are mistaken ; for I will appreciate your sentiments, however extravagant they may be, agreeable to my opinion of the true resemblance they may bear to the original model of your affections. If your sentiments are just, they will be deserving of commendation ; if not, they shall, I promise you, meet with the chastisement of my dispraise : they will, no doubt contain plenty of hyperbole and poetical imagery. So mount, Sir Apollo, your throne on the Parnassian Hill, and give me a specimen to what elevation you can raise so exalted a theme as the pure and unsullied female character : which is the most perfect specimen of dame Nature’s handy-works. And a pity it is it should ever be defaced or destroyed by the mischievous and wicked arts of the opposite sex.”

“ I hope, dear madam, our sentiments will agree on the present subject ; although, unfor-

tunately, they do not always coalesce. For instance—you are for secrecy, privacy, and mystery, while I am for publicity and open conduct, acting that part which the world will approve, and rejecting that which it condemns. But as you wish to hear my opinions and sentiments, I will give them you, of the virtuous female of our species—lovely woman: who consoles man in his afflictions and soothes him in his tribulations; while, at other times, she animates him to deeds of glory and high achievements, and again controls the impetuosity of his career, and, by the mildest counsel and most prudent conduct, nourishes those virtues which are called domestic, which promotes the happiness of all around her.”

“Very fine, Mr. Ardent, upon my word, very fine, indeed. And pray when does your sapience expect to meet with all these perfections assembled in one person? I would not have you expect it in this life, and still less in the next, for they say, there are no marriages beyond the grave.”

“If such, madam, is your opinion of earthly felicity, or, rather, the absence of it, I know not what you will say to a farther specimen of my

extravagancy upon that subject : which you will perhaps consider as carried to a degree of enthusiasm more resembling the effusions of a mad lover, or, perhaps, an infatuated one, than one possessed of sober reason, or overwhelmed, as you sometimes say you are, with sober sadness. But, however, without farther procrastination, delay, hindrance, interposition, predisposition, preparations, preludes, or prologues, to gain time and soften down the censure of animadversion, dispraise, and the like copulatives and conjunctives, I will begin, laugh as you may, and no doubt will, at such an effusion on lovely woman by the most romantic Damon of the nineteenth century."

" Well, Ardent, if this is not rank burlesque or burlesque rant, I know not what is. You may possibly consider yourself a sensible man, but, in my opinion, you are very nearly allied to a fool upon some occasions, and at the present moment most deservedly so."

" In answer to your observation, Mrs. Freelove, you will please to recollect that I am still within the bower of enchantment, and, consequently, under the influence of magic. Your own personal

charms and attractions are powerful spells upon the present occasion : especially when you consider my sentiments of you are, in all probability, the most prepossessing and influential that ever man felt for woman in this wild, romantic, and picturesque scenery of Windsor Forest. In short, existence to me is no longer a business but a pleasure, a romance, a fable, an extravagance of the passion of love, almost beyond what is human, and partaking, in my opinion, of a divine origin : it is the impetuous impulse of the passions, chained for years and now set free ; a liberation, a holyday, a banqueting season, a festive diversion, an association with woman in her softest moments and most rapturous enjoyments—for such they have at times been with you.”

“ Go on, sir paragon of enthusiastic extravagance, for as you have complimented me with having inspired your imagination, I am in duty bound to listen to your effusions, not only with complacency but admiration, if not approbation. So now let me hear this poetical description of your fancy ; which, if chastened by judgment, must at least prove the more agreeable—so, now proceed.”

“ I will, dear madam, and beg you will not only feel pleased but edified. Now, then,—ha, hem—I will entitle it, ‘A Rhapsody on Female Perfections and Loveliness of Person.’ Woman, as regards man, is the joy and comfort of his existence, a second self, in whom all confidence is placed. The virtuous woman has not been unaptly compared to an angel of light, reflecting around her a radiance of happiness and effusions of joy and contentment unknown to the solitary recluse. Woman, educated, is a noble specimen of finished perfections, in whom is combined all that is amiable, all that is virtuous, and all that is divine; the emanations of whose purity transfuse through the mind of the beholder as gleams of celestial excellence. The graces and loves unite their influence in attracting the attention of the enraptured, until the all-powerful God, who presides over the blissful parts of human destiny, selects a shaft, refulgent with smiles and tenderness, and pierces the heart of the adorer. Is it in the power of man to express the fascinations of a celestial being, the orbs of whose fair sight transcend the sparkling diamond in brilliancy of light? The stars of Heaven are but as counter-

parts in splendour, and even the great illuminator of Nature delightedly shines forth to display the divinity of her form. The graceful movements of this fair object are in all the attitudes of softness, intermixed with tenderness, peculiar to herself: her breathing is as the spicy gales of Arabia, fanning the morning dew from the lips of Flora's most favoured flowers. But, oh, ye gods! when she speaks, the world in silent rapture stands amazed at the harmonious music of words which flow in mellifluous tones from lips embalmed in all their native sweets. And when offering her praises to the Deity, not all the vocal choir of Heaven surpass, in heart-felt melody, the proffered lays of this fair being; even Orpheus himself stands mute in silent astonishment at perfections that so far surpass his art, that in despair he no longer tunes the lyre, while man, for whose cheer even the uttermost parts of the earth are ransacked to furnish comforts worthy of his acceptance, finds all those luxuries, though highly gratifying to his senses, far inferior to that tender sympathy, implanted by Divine Providence for the noblest of all rational purposes—the perpetuation of happiness, and the delights of

man's understanding and existence. That such an helpmate should have been ordained by Providence as a counterpart to man, extorts, in return, the ecstasy of adoration and praise to that Almighty God from whose benevolence this perfection springs."

"Is that all, Ardent? truly, a most wonderful and excellent performance, indeed. And pray, sage sir, where did you learn so exalted a notion of female charms and loveliness? It was certainly not in this retreat of mine, or from my resemblance; but purely, I suspect, from the creative imagination of your own poetic brain."

"Ah! dear madam, the time has been when I thought I could not pay you too high a compliment; and even now, in this half-blissful Paradise, I still think most highly of you—and if, unhappily, it is a delusion, I can scarcely wish to be undeceived: for while I think that you still possess many perfections, I am happy—was I to think otherwise, I should be miserable. For the mind of man pictures to itself divine attributes in female perfections, and then seeks for the female saint or beauty that approximates nearest to his preconceived notions of sublimity

and propriety, and having, as he conceives, found her, is unwilling to relinquish the fond hope that it was otherwise than by Divine appointment: for very seldom do we hear that the devil has anything to do with love affairs—I should suppose his business is to mar happiness, rather than promote it.”

“ You are a strange being, Ardent, but nevertheless one, I fear, of ill omen to me: however, let me hear no more of your observations and comments, lest their freedom should become intolerable to my feelings.”

“ I was just thinking, madam, that ours has been a very long conversation; and, for other reasons besides my freedom of language, it is time I should take my leave. For your Arcadian retreat has so many associations connected with it, that it may be dangerous to continue longer: at least, if we intend adhering to our newly made resolves, of being only friends and no longer lovers.”

“ Nay, Ardent, I did not tell you to run away, and you must be a coward, indeed, to fly through a distrust of yourself; rather stay and prove the strength of your resolutions, and, by way of

passing the time as innocently as possible, I will sing you a song, in return for the rhapsody with which you just now favoured me. And as yours was of your own composition, so shall mine be also, although in a far less flighty strain; and an effusion not originating so much in the head as in the heart."

"I shall be delighted, dear madam, with any song from you, and especially one of your own composition, for I knew not that you patronized the muses in your own person; however, I am glad of it, as it may afford you some amusement, and tend to relieve those gloomy hours which distress you so much. And now, fair lady, if you please, I am all attention."

"I hope so, Ardent, and admiration also; for I have sufficient vanity to think it has more of nature in it than had yours:—

" SONG.

" Oh ! stay with me from the noon-tide heat,
In this sylvan laurel grove ;
Where the red-breasts carol their notes so sweet,
And the nightingale sings to its love.

“To visit these bowers doth Venus delight,
For at liberty here she can rove ;
In its shades she enjoys the voluptuous rite
Of free uncontrollable love.”

“Very prettily sung, indeed, Mrs. Freelove, and the voice compensates for its sentiments, which are, indeed, not so very chastened by the cool notions of purity and propriety ; but, as they are not the less dangerous to me on that account, I must fly while a laurel yet remains on my brow. For even your own lays, assisted by the sweeter melody of your voice, forewarn me that danger lurks within these shady groves and sequestered bowers ; therefore, I must fly, or woe be to the sanctified observance of our righteous resolves.”

“Well, sir, run away ;—when am I to see you again ?”

“To-morrow forenoon, fair lady, if you please, when, if agreeable to yourself, we will mount our steeds, and sally forth over hills, dales, and heathy plains ; therefore, do not detain me now any longer, lest we have to mourn over our broken vows to-morrow. Farewell, too dangerous and fascinating lady.”

“ And farewell, too cowardly and too easily alarmed gentleman.”

Ardent shook his head, scarce daring to reply, and left the presence of this strange, contradictory, yet fascinating, woman; little divining in his own mind, that he would shortly have another danger to encounter in those very grounds, in the person of a still more beautiful woman than the one who now held him in her chains.”

CHAPTER IV.

SHORTLY after the foregoing serio-burlesque conversation, Ardent received a hasty summons to the lodge, to attend a lady who was on a visit to the object of his affections. Having returned an answer by the servant that he would attend as quickly as possible, he speedily revolved in his mind some circumstances he had heard respecting this lady, whose beauty had been represented to him as such, that it could not be looked on by the opposite sex with impunity; and, although Ardent did not exactly believe this, as far as regarded himself, thinking it impossible she could surpass his own bewitching idol, yet he felt a curiosity which amounted almost to trepidation, to behold what had been represented to him as an incomparable paragon. Therefore, with a beating heart, he sallied forth to the bower of his lady love, where, having arrived, he was immediately introduced into the presence of Mrs.

Freelove, her beautiful friend, and an extremely ugly man, whose face bore innumerable certificates of his having duly gone through all the forms and gradations of small-pox. Ardent surveyed the group before him with surprise, and so far from any indisposition being apparent, they appeared to be merrily seated with their dessert before them, consisting of wine, fruit, &c. Ardent therefore addressed his fair friend, saying that, in obedience to her summons, he hastened to render any service that the lady, her visitor, might require. But Mrs. Freelove coldly answered, that it was not herself who had issued that summons, but her friend, Mrs. Lovely : to that lady she referred him for an account of the indisposition, whatever it may be, under which she laboured.

Mrs. Lovely, observing the tone of pique in which these words were uttered, smiled, and informed Ardent that she was indeed the patient who had sent for him, not from any bodily indisposition, but from a kind of ennui, which rather required his conversational than medical services : “ For,” she observed, “ you know an old and true saying, that there is no sociality where there

are but three in company, which you see was our number ; and as it appeared to me an injustice to deprive Mrs. Freelove of any of the agreeable attentions of her friend, I sent for you to relieve him from the arduous task of attempting to entertain two ladies at one time. What say you, Mr. Ardent,—will you undertake the office I have proposed to you ?”

“ I feel highly flattered, madam, by the distinction you have conferred on me, and am happy that my services are not required for anything more serious ; but as our company is still small, would it not appear a breach of sociality to divide it into two separate parties ?”

Ardent looked at his friend, Mrs. Freelove, as he concluded his reply to her fair visitant, whose advances towards him he observed were evidently displeasing to her pretty hostess ; and beautiful as was the person of the fair visitant, he still held his allegiance to the queen of his idolatry, who, he observed with a kind of selfish pleasure, received the attentions of her Caliban-like male companion with ill-concealed disgust ; so that, although Ardent felt no pangs of jealousy on his account, he was too generous not to feel for her situation, tormented

as she appeared to be with the combined feelings of jealousy and disgust ; for it required no extraordinary efforts of his vanity to perceive that the undivided attention of such an opposite to an Adonis, would be a severe affliction to either of the ladies ; more especially to her who had a real claim to the affections and attentions of Ardent. And he had the satisfaction to observe a smile of approbation on her countenance, when, in acquiescence to his proposition, she suggested they should amuse each other by singing, as she was aware that both her visitors were gifted with vocal talents. Agreeable to this suggestion, the two ladies, with their fret-face visitor, sang many songs, of a lively and amatory nature ; the two former, much to the delight of Ardent, who, although no singer himself, was very susceptible of the fascination of sweet sounds and amorous compositions, especially when flowing from the beautiful lips of two lovely women ; and although he could not admire the boisterous sea-songs sung by one who appeared to him to be a marine or nautical monster, yet they served, in his opinion, to heighten the contrast of the different styles of singing, which seemed to his imagination

like a vocal contest between the syrens and sea-bear. Be this as it may, Ardent's mind was so attuned to harmony by the bewitching strains of the lovely syrens, that he felt no inclination to be unnecessarily severe on the boreas-like intonations of the rugged-faced biped. Still Ardent could not help observing that the tones in which his captivating mistress sang her lays were plaintive and melancholy, conveying an idea to his imagination, that her mind was ill at ease, and that she had not yet forgotten or forgiven the conduct of her fair friend in sending for Ardent under the plea of indisposition, although with the real intent of engrossing his attention to herself, which, setting more tender considerations aside, appeared to be also a breach of decorum towards herself, the lady of the house ; and although she endeavoured to assume an appearance of gayety, or at least tranquillity, yet Ardent remarked that she watched himself and her fair visitor with a kind of suspicious vigilance, which, although perhaps not so conspicuous to the observation of the visitors, yet was clearly apparent to one so interested as himself, for he was not so blind but he could discern the evident superiority of Mrs. Lovely in

personal charms; nor was he so entirely ignorant of the female heart, as not to be aware, that even that might be construed into an offence by Mrs. Freelove, who would possibly imagine that in her beautiful friend she might find a powerful and dangerous rival. Indeed, such was the lovely appearance of this lady, whose residence Ardent learnt was by the sea-side, that he almost conceived her to be one of the beauties from the court of Amphitrite, and who was sent from thence that she might not cause Neptune himself to swerve in his connubial allegiance to his lawful queen. The little party, however, contrived to beguile the time until the bright rays of the moon had succeeded a soft twilight, and the ladies proposed a walk round the lawn by way of enjoying the pure air of evening under its chastened beams. The gentlemen gladly offered themselves as an escort; and Ardent, attentive to the feelings of his much-loved but eccentric mistress, instantly offered her his arm, which she with an evident smile of triumph accepted. Mr. Cribbageface then offered his arm to her beautiful friend, who, seeing no other alternative, accepted it with ill-concealed marks of dissatisfaction and mortification.

Thus paired, they sallied forth, the moon appearing to shine with increased splendour on the lovely beings who hung on the arms of their admiring partners; when, after two or three circles round the lawn, Mrs. Lovely, which was the name of the fair visitant, suddenly stopped and proposed an exchange of partners, at the same time observing, that as she was the patient who had summoned the medical gentleman, she had the best claim on his attention. Mrs. Free-love was evidently surprised at the very marked conduct of her visitor, yet she forbore to make any comments, but, endeavouring to assume a tone of gayety, acquiesced in the proposition, and, turning to Ardent, affected to reprove him for his want of attention to his fair patient. After the exchange had been made, the following colloquy took place between Mrs. Lovely and our friend Ardent:—

“ My conduct may appear strange, Mr. Ardent, but I have particular reasons for it, for which, if you will walk apart with me from Mrs. Freelove and her friend, I will give you my explanations.

“I shall be very happy, madam, to attend you anywhere. But what construction will our company place on our retreat amid these shady bowers?”

“I care not, Mr. Ardent, what construction they may place on it; I have very sufficient reasons for my conduct, and, to tell you the truth, I like my company so little, especially that ill-looking fellow pitted with the small-pox, that had it not been for a particular wish I had to see and converse with you, I believe I should have left the village this afternoon. In the first place, can you tell me who the horrid-looking creature is?”

“Indeed, madam, I cannot. It is the first time I ever met with him; but I should judge from his appearance and manner, that he either is, or has been, in the sea service, and, as far as I can conceive, in no very high station.”

“Well, then, I believe you cannot plead ignorance of the next person of whom I am about to speak, and that is Mrs. Freelove. Now, will you candidly tell me what you know of her?”

“Really, madam, your question comes so

sudden, and appears so extraordinary, that you will pardon me if I answer it by inquiring your motive for putting it."

"Well, sir; then I will humour you by answering your question first, and will candidly confess to you that I suspect this lady has lured my husband's affections from me; for, in his frequent journeys to and from the metropolis, he usually stays here two or three days and nights, and when at home is never weary of sounding her praises. I learn, also, she is the patroness of the Sunday school, and I seriously ask you if you think her worthy of superintending the morals of the rising generation. I shall not farther apologize for thus questioning you, now I have informed you of my anxious motive and the unquiet state of my mind."

"Ardent paused, and seemed still listening to what his lovely companion had farther to say; but, in reality, he was considering what reply to make to so very abrupt yet delicate a question.

The lady seemed impatient, and said, "You pause, Mr. Ardent, as if you were considering how you should evade my question; but mark me, if you do not answer me in a satisfactory manner,

I may, perhaps, judge even more uncharitably of the lady's character than she deserves."

"Ardent felt both vexed and perplexed, and he could not help surmising that the lady had, perhaps, further motives than she had confessed for discovering a flaw in the character of his fair mistress; but, at the same time, his own curiosity and anxiety were raised to know how far the lady's grounds of jealousy were or were not founded in reason, but, as he saw there was a necessity of answering her question, he replied, "It is not in my power, madam, to give you information to the extent you may perhaps wish for, as my acquaintance with Mrs. Freeloze has not been of long duration; consequently, my knowledge of her must be proportionately limited. But thus far I know, she is very charitable, very religious, very observant in her general conduct, and as to her private life, I cannot be supposed to know much of that, as ladies do not always allow their medical attendants to pry into the secrets of their establishment."

"Still, Mr. Ardent, you evade my question, which I will now put into a plainer form: do you or do you not consider Mrs. Freeloze to be a

prudent, discreet, virtuous, and exemplary character?"

"And I, madam, answer it by asking you if you think she would practise all those virtues of which I just now informed you, if she was not?"

"Then, sir, by your still answering me so evasively, I am to conclude you think her a dubious character at the best, and the worst my own imagination may depict."

"There, madam, you are too hasty, and, from any thing I have said, have no right to come to a conclusion of that nature; for how know we but she may possess, in addition to her religious virtues and charities, the chastity of Clarissa, the purity of a Lucretia, or, indeed, the cold and sacred constitution of a vestal. For my part, I really think her an amiable woman, with no guile upon her tongue or venom in her heart."

"Enough, sir! I now understand the state of your mind and feelings, and really I am concerned for you; for I plainly perceive that you are no longer master of yourself, but have surrendered your heart and soul to one who, I fear, will prove undeserving the confidence reposed in her. But, tell me, have you never heard any thing suspi-

cious respecting her ; no rumours, no strange whisperings of something wrong?"

Here the natural jealousy and impetuosity of Ardent threw him off his guard. It was attacking him on a point where he had been all along extremely vulnerable ; and he replied, he certainly had heard suspicious insinuations, which he believed to proceed from envy, malice, and detraction, and, therefore, had not given credence to them ; on the contrary, had endeavoured to vindicate her character from what he believed to be unjust aspersions."

" Not so unjust, perhaps, Mr. Ardent, as you imagine, for those sort of rumours seldom arise without some cause or foundation."

" You alarm me, madam, for, to confess a truth, my heart and soul are, as you suspect, centered in this fascinating woman. Indeed, I am so far engaged to her, that we should, ere now, have been united in the bands of matrimony, had it not been for the repugnance of my father and mother, who wished me to marry a lady much younger than the one we are speaking of, and whose character for respectability is undoubted ; but, such are the fascinations of Mrs.

Freelove, that I neither can or wish to disentangle myself from her, unless she prove false or deceptive. In the event of so distressing a discovery, I would first attempt to reclaim her, and should that be impracticable, your cause would then be mine; and, in espousing it, I would take care that she should be no longer a bane to virtue, or a further cause of distress to sorrowing wives and maidens. But heaven grant I may never have such a trial to undergo, for I love her to such a height of enthusiasm, that it would endanger reason, if not life itself."

"Your jealousy, Ardent, is the most convincing proof you can give of your excessive attachment towards her; you are fully infected with the malady of love, and that, I fear, of the worst sort or description, unless it meets with a suitable and proper return, which I think you must not expect from Mrs. Freelove. Depend on it, Ardent, you are paying her too great a compliment in being so violently attached to her; you are sacrificing yourself to her caprice, and, perhaps, dissimilar way of thinking; for, if I am not greatly deceived, yours is not exactly the kind of love she requires, as it may eventually prove

highly troublesome and dangerous to her. Was you married to her, and she a prudent woman, all would be very well ; as it is, I foresee the worst evils that can befall you both, and especially yourself ; for should she not prove to be as you now fancy her—almost an angel—she will bring ruin on you, and you on her. It is into some such net I suspect my husband to have fallen, and I have purposely come to find out the cause, if possible, that I may either have my suspicions refuted, or, if confirmed, redress my wrongs, and do myself justice. Was my husband as devotedly fond of me as you are of Mrs. Free-love, I should be a happy woman indeed. But as it is, you are infatuated with her, and I fear my husband is the same. O, would I could but prove it!”

“ You would, then, madam, only be the more miserable ; so let me beg you will leave this affair to Providence, or, I may rather say, to my management ; for, now my suspicions are again excited, I shall not rest until they are confirmed or removed. Slight errors may be pardoned, but not infamy.”

“ You are an enthusiast, Ardent ; you appear not to know the world you live in, more espe-

cially, I suspect, the fair inhabitants of it. But as you have given me your opinion of Mrs. Freelove, at least with the qualifications of a gentleman, perhaps, by the way of passing the time, you will give me your opinion of myself: for, although our acquaintance has been very short, it has been somewhat extraordinary. But first let me tell you, I fear, and very much fear, a volcano is beneath your feet, and that Mount *Ætna* has not produced a greater convulsion in Sicily than you will in this village; and I further think you will prove as great a phenomenon in the moral world, figuratively speaking, as *Ætna* or *Vesuvius* are in the world of nature. I foresee the abyss that is now beneath your feet: a spark only is necessary to be communicated to the magazine of combustibles, when all will be known, confusion will again return; until the Almighty's hand shall make virtue visible to the confines of the earth, and sink vice and immorality in its caverns. Now, Mr. Ardent, I have done with predictions, and request you will favour me with your opinion of myself."

"Really, madam, your imaginary foresight exceeds all I ever heard; you have taken upon

yourself the character of an ancient sybil, or a lady of great penetration into future events; yet I cannot think it likely any thing I may do or say would reach so far as the confines of the earth. That would be making me appear a paragon indeed, and as great a pretender to extraordinary influence as Martin Luther and others, who benefitted morals when they established religion on a surer foundation, and enforced it by their precepts and examples; some as founders and others as reclaimers from the Popish superstitions and the ignorance of the dark ages, so justly attributed to priestcraft and spiritual tyranny, when exercised by the court of Rome over this country and Europe.”

“ Upon my word, Mr. Ardent, your expatiation exceeds my divination, and you appear utterly to have forgotten the question I put to you.”

“ Very true, madam; but then it was a question that required a separate consideration, and could not be classed with the graver cast of our discourse. Indeed, as it is, I scarce know how to give utterance to my thoughts on the subject; for, although I am a great admirer of female

beauty, I feel a difficulty in describing the effect it has upon my imagination."

"So it appears, sir, and not only a difficulty, but an extreme reluctance either to raise or depress my vanity too much; but, as I have a very particular reason for wishing to hear your sentiments respecting me, I must positively insist upon your obeying my request."

Ardent thought the request somewhat singular and unusual; and although he could not divine her motive for it, he resolved as circumspectly as possible to humour it. He therefore replied, "I presume, madam, by your requiring my opinion on a subject of this nature, that Mrs. Freelove has informed you of the enthusiastic admiration with which I behold female charms and loveliness of person; and as you, madam, possess these in an eminent degree, I also presume it is your wish to amuse yourself with a specimen of the extravagance of my description upon so boundless a topic."

"Very well, Mr. Ardent. So far, at least, you allow me to possess personal charms. But my curiosity will not be half satisfied, unless you inform me of what nature or class you consider

them ; for, as you are both an admirer of and connoisseur in female beauty, it will give me at least some satisfaction to hear my description from one so qualified to give an opinion, that I may know how far, or to what extent of personal charms I may pride myself as being the possessor of; for without such opinion I may possibly rank my pretensions too high, from which superabundance of vanity it will be but an act of charity in you to rescue me."

" There is little danger, madam," said Ardent, bowing, " of your estimating your charms too highly ; for, although there are several distinct sorts of beauty, yours is pre-eminently complete of its kind,—in fact, a model of that commanding Juno-like beauty that would give dignity to a coronet. There are some kind of beauties, such, for instance, as the pretty modest village maiden, who pleases from her simplicity and innocence, who steals into the heart by her bashful diffidence and timidity ; whereas you appear to command admiration, and, as it were, insist upon attention, that all may behold and admire the majesty of form that does not frequently bless the sight."

" Well done, Mr. Extravagance. I find that

my vanity has hitherto taken a very humble flight in comparison of your high-soaring ideas. But, however, I am not so much of a woman as not to make considerable allowance for politeness and flattery."

"Which, madam, in the present instance, you must not do, as I have merely given you my plain and honest opinion, without ornament or embellishment; indeed, I wonder at my own moderation, for I have been frequently informed by Mrs. Freelove, such was your beauty of person, that I should not be able to look upon you with impunity, or without being an admirer of your splendid attractions."

"Well, sir, what think you of her talents for augury? are they or will they be accomplished, do you think?"

The lady pressed heavier on the arm of Ardent while putting this question. Ardent felt surprised, and began to entertain rather a strange opinion of the morals, heart, or mind of his fair companion. But, as he resolved to give the lady as good an opinion as possible of his Joseph-like qualities, he replied in the following manner to her somewhat embarrassing question:—

“ You, madam, are a married lady, which is an insuperable barrier to my thinking of you in any other way than as an amiable and beautiful woman, and I trust I shall never have the daring effrontery to presume even for a moment to think of beholding you in any other character; and even now, by the light of this bright moon, I can fancy I am speaking to a divinity, or one of the noblest mortal specimens of the Almighty’s works; or, to make use of another simile, I can contemplate and admire you as a statuary does his marble Venus.”

The lady did not appear to be too well pleased with the moderation of Ardent, and she replied in a tone of sarcasm and pique :

“ Admirable discrimination ! So you think I am to be contemplated as a statue admired by a connoisseur or dilettante, but not loved. Certainly, if I was an antique, I should not be surprised at the coolness of your prudence, but as it is, I admire your sanctity, your religion, and your scrupulously virtuous and moral notions, as well as your awful dread of scaling the formidable barrier, as you term it, of the marriage vow. Truly, I am very fortunate in a companion whose scruples I am to consider as my safeguard !

Exemplary young man ! where can a woman meet with a more incontestible proof of the dignity of virtue, and its incapability of being subdued by temptation and opportunity ? Oh ! paragon of modesty and moderation, you deserve to be happy ; but, mark my words, you will be miserable,—you have placed your affections upon a bad foundation, which will deceive you, however promising it may now appear.”

Ardent was amazed at the lady’s language, and also at the manner in which it was spoken, and he inwardly prayed that he might possess that stock of grace which his fair companion had sneeringly complimented him upon ; and, to make sure of which, he conceived it would be as well to endeavour to bring the conversation to a final close, by returning to the company. He therefore besought the lady as delicately as possible to consider the constructions that may be placed upon their long absence. He reminded her that it was late, and the secluded walk they were then in, which was denominated the lovers’ walk, would only add to the raillery or suspicions they might incur.

The lady appeared to understand the cause of

his uneasiness, and inwardly rejoiced at it, at the same time she was resolved not to yield to his proposition. However, she thought proper to moderate the tone of her discourse, or rather the subject of it; therefore, she calmly replied, "I am in no hurry, Mr. Ardent, to leave this beautiful spot; so, by way of passing the time, give me your opinion as to who sang the best, myself or Mrs. Freelove."

"Indeed, madam, I am not sufficiently scientific to give a correct opinion on the occasion; but as you each differ in your styles of personal beauty, so in like manner do you in vocal harmony, but, as far as I can judge, I candidly confess you have the superiority in voice, which appears to me exceedingly fine and full-toned; and, as I have not heard a great deal of singing, it is to me peculiarly enchanting, ravishing the senses, and leading the judgment captive; at the same time, I cannot help saying that I am, if possible, more pleased with the singing of Mrs. Freelove, and for this reason: she seems to appeal to the heart, which in return beats or vibrates in unison with her plaintive tones, and

when she ceases to sing, its tremulous motion also sinks into a softened and pleasing calm. Her songs are of a more plaintive cast than yours, and approach almost to a religious melancholy, as if the prelude of some grand catastrophe. Sometimes they remind me of the notes of the dying swan, when it sings its requiem so celebrated by the poets; at other times, I fancy it is like the voice of an angel from heaven, singing the promises of paradise: while your songs, Mrs. Lovely, are sung with all the vivacity of this life, and are rather addressed to our corporeal than our spiritual senses, which accords very well with your style of beauty; indeed, if I may so express myself, you are the lark, and Mrs. Freelove the Nightingale. The morning and evening hymn sung by her sometimes, when we are without other company, has a very peculiar effect upon me, and she will frequently sing them to soothe me in a melancholy hour."

"So much for our voices; and now, to put your judgment and impartiality once more to the test, what think you of that ornament of nature, the different colours of our hair and complexion?

There, I believe, I have no great reason to dread a superiority."

"And there, madam, I believe Paris himself would be puzzled; for my own part, I confess myself quite incompetent to the decision, and know not how to choose between your fair hair and brilliant complexion, or the beautiful dark hair and brunette tint of Mrs. Freelove; but you are both so eminently pleasing, and are so liberally possessed of all the personal attractions that adorn the most beautiful of womankind, that even a voluptuary would hesitate in making a selection, and would therefore wish to possess you both. Would that your minds were regulated by the wisdom of a husband who could appreciate your worth and direct your virtuous sentiments! You would each be to them all that could be valuable or desired in women, and your loveliness would then contribute to the confirmation of your husbands' happiness; for where the mind is governed by sense and reason, how is it possible to deviate from virtue, unless, indeed, under extraordinary circumstances, or the vicissitudes of those fortunes that experience great fluctua-

tions. To be defective in virtue, is to be deficient in wisdom, religion, and morals, the absence of which must eventually terminate in the overthrow of every grace, every generous sentiment or regularity of the mind, and terminate in despondency, distraction, despair, madness, and possibly ruin in this world and the next."

"An excellent sermon, Mr. Ardent, truly,—it is only a pity the congregation is so limited; it is now an actual waste of fine words and very proper sentiments, which in future, I hope, will not be unpacked for the uncertain benefit of so small an audience. However, I beg you will reserve the remaining stock of your morality, which you have hitherto bestowed so lavishly on me, and have the kindness now to assume the more natural character of a young man of this world, and, with all the passions and feelings incident to a being of that description, give me your opinion of the tender passion. So now, if you please to descend from your heroics, and, in the presence of this bright moon, condescend to be my equal on earth,—and remember the mild goddess is often invoked as a witness by the lover in his vows to his mistress,—so let me hear

how well you can harangue on the topic of love in the presence of yon exalted arbitress."

"Agreed, fair lady, and, as the bright luminary, or, as she is sometimes styled, the goddess Diana, is the patroness of chastity and purity, I shall be careful not to offend her chastened delicacy by forgetting that I am conversing with one who is protected by the sacred ægis of the marriage vow, and who should be addressed as an immortal Juno, and not one of earthly mould. We were just now discussing the peculiarities of beauty, and whether the fair or dark has the pre-eminence in the estimation of mankind; I remarked, that both are excellent in their kind, but omitted to observe the choice depended more on the endowments of the heart and mind, than from the difference of complexion. Symmetry all admire, especially when accompanied with a fine skin, bright eyes, good features, and gracefulness of person; indeed, all who are not brutes, are sensible of their influence over the imagination, and, sometimes, judgment. The lover associates in his fancy the various excellencies which, according to his judgment, constitute real beauty; and when he sees perfection before

him, or what is nearly so, he submits the object to the scrutiny of the ideal picture he has portrayed on his imagination; and, as the individual approximates to his preconceptions, so, in like manner, he decides she is more or less deserving of his commendation or consideration,—at least, as to her outward form. Her mind is, or should be, submitted to the same criticism; her virtues, if correct, will also bear the same examination; her temper and passions must be equally under the guidance of reason, to be approved; and, where marriage is in view, her fortune should be submitted to the same test, either in his own judgment or in that of a friend. The same kind of reasoning is equally applicable to man as to woman; for lovely woman, in her estimation of the opposite sex, draws the same inferences and conclusions, by the aid of her own observations and the comments of her friends; and such is necessary to make marriage happy, and prevent that dissension of opinion which is sometimes unhappily found to exist in that state which, of all others, should be cemented by a union of interests, opinions, and affectionate regards. These considerations, when well matured, are

every way worthy of the contemplative mind that aims at an exalted state of happiness, as their sound sense and discretion accord with the judgment, and constitute what is called the prudence of things ; at least, as far as the sexes are concerned in each other's welfare and happiness during their abode in this sublunary world."

" For mercy's sake, Mr. Ardent, stop ; you forget that I appealed to you as a young man for your sentiments and opinions on the passion of love, and here have you been answering in the style of an ancient philosopher, whose custom it was to harangue on the profundity of wisdom, morals, religion, and the sciences. Most erudite and sagacious sir, will you allow me to ask you if you intend these theoretical tactics to be reduced to practical experience ?"

" I hope so, madam ; for, if the essentials to happiness are taken upon trust, without due and proper consideration, or not submitted to the test of reason, the parties immediately become the children of Providence in a more especial manner, and who accordingly punishes them for their disobedience to the established rules of

society, which are founded and calculated to make not only individuals but communities happy."

"Upon my word, an admirable logician, and spoken too with such imperturbable gravity! really, if there is any truth in the Pythagorean doctrine, your soul, after your present decease, will enter the body of one of Minerva's birds; indeed, I am puzzled to know from what sage it has heretofore descended to you,—some very profound one, I am sure, for you speak with all the experience of age, although it is with the tongue of youth. Upon my word, Ardent, you are an extraordinary person, and, I believe, such another is not to be found within the circle of this widely extended forest. And yet I foresee that neither your wisdom or profundity will preserve you from the snare that is so palpably spread for you, and which a man of more ordinary perceptions would easily perceive and avoid."

"I must confess, madam, I at present see no cause for suspicion to the extent you speak of; indeed, when I think of the grace that has been given me to pass through the temptations of this evening, I fancy the danger must be extraordinary indeed that would occasion my destruction."

“ Well, well, Mr. Confidence, go on, then, in your present hoodwinked state,—you will learn wisdom soon enough by experience; but mark me, it will be of a different nature to the logical discourses with which you have favoured me this evening; and, as I feel amused with the morality which you have adopted, however mistimed I may consider it, I propose that we renew our conversation in this place to-morrow evening, when we can again converse upon this interesting subject.”

“ Ah, madam, you are determined on knowing to what extent I can resist temptation; but remember I am human, and cannot boast of being exempt from the frailties of human nature; besides, you are too captivating, my dear madam, not to be a very dangerous companion to an individual whose passions are so inflammable, as the excess of my attachment to Mrs. Freelove too surely proves. Luckily for my conscience, my regard for her invades not the sacred rights of another,—of that I hope I am incapable; for although I am a young man, I trust I am not too young to discriminate virtue from vice, and by keeping within the barriers of one, avoid

entering on the boundaries of the other. And now, madam, that we may not forfeit the good opinion we entertain of ourselves, do you not think we had better return to our company, who, having retired to the house, may feel somewhat surprised at our protracted stay in these dangerous and tempting alcoves."

The lady appeared somewhat mortified at the pertinacity of Ardent's wish to return to the company, although it was now getting very late ; but, resolving to put the Torpedo-like qualities, which Ardent had this evening displayed, farther to the proof, she seized his hand, and, placing it on her bosom, said, " Tell me, Ardent, do you not think a heart could be found which would beat in unison with the one that now wildly throbs under your palm ? or do you think the heart of Eve met not with sympathetic and rapturous bounds when herself and Adam were alone in the garden of Eden, like as we, for instance, are in this ?"

Ardent trembled, and felt no longer in doubt as to the pliable disposition of his fair companion ; and, perhaps, even the fascinating widow would have been forgotten, had he not remembered that

the lovely being before him had sworn before God and man to be faithful and true to him to whom her destiny had united her ; therefore, recollecting the commandment, “Thou shalt not commit adultery,” he gently withdrew his hand, and replied, “Yes, lady, I trust, however unhappily you suspect to the contrary, that the heart of your husband beats in unison with your own ; and that he beholds you with the same eyes of affection as Adam did his beloved Eve, when in the garden of Eden. And as I have neither the honour nor happiness of being your lawful Adam, is it fair, think you, lady, that I should be exposed to his temptations in this bewitching spot?”

The lady, finding her witchery to be totally unavailing with such a being as Ardent, suffered him to draw her arm gently within his, and escort her to the house ; where, on entering, Ardent discovered, to his sorrow and mortification, a cloud of anger on the brow of Mrs. Freelove, which seemed scarcely able to find vent in words. At length, with a look such as he had never seen before, she said, “Mighty well ! so you are come in at last. As for you, Ardent, never let me see your face again ; you and Mrs. Lovely have left

our company more than three hours,—it is now near twelve o'clock ; I expect—indeed, I insist, on any visitors of mine observing the rules of propriety, which you, Ardent, have now so outrageously violated ; therefore, get you gone, and never enter my house again.”

Ardent felt confounded and at a loss for reply, but stammered out something about the time having passed rapidly, the fineness of the evening, and not aware of its being so late ; all which appeased not the wrath of Mrs. Freelove, who, raising her voice, declared she would not hear him, for it was impossible to defend such conduct on any principles of propriety ; therefore, again bid him instantly depart, as she was too offended to endure his company.

Ardent found all explanation was not only useless, but served to exasperate her still farther against him, and, therefore, with a heart more in sorrow than in anger, retired.

After leaving the house of his fair enslaver, Ardent revolved in his mind what could cause the extraordinary and unusual anger of the lady of his affections ; he feared herself and Mr. Cribbageface must have overheard either the

whole or part of his conversation with Mrs. Lovely, and, if so, he was aware the storm he had just witnessed was trifling in comparison with what would take place the next time they met. Then again, he thought it might only be jealousy, arising from the idea that he was transferring his allegiance from herself to her lovely friend ; this thought somewhat soothed him, as he knew that a redoubled attention to herself would easily clear away such suspicion : with this thought he reached home, resolving to make his peace with his offended mistress as early as possible.

CHAPTER V.

THE day following Ardent's adventure within the bowers of enchantment and infatuation was passed by him in a state of conflicting sentiments and opinions ; in fact, a combat between reason and infatuation. Reason made him aware that both his bodily and mental welfare were at stake, in his excessive attention and self-devotion at this, to him, truly Circean palace, or, indeed, it might have been compared to the stream of Salmacis,—whoever entered therein left half his manly virtues behind him.

The mind of Ardent made strenuous efforts to regain its freedom, and he mentally resolved to devote himself more strictly to the duties of his profession, that by so doing he might be the better enabled to free himself from those entanglements which, he began to fear, would prove illusive and destructive. He endeavoured to summon fortitude to his aid, that he might abstain from the temptations which beset him,

in the form of assignations, banquets, &c.; at which destruction presided, in the various shapes of witching smiles, and the softest blandishments, voluptuous attitudes, and amatory conversations; all aided by the liquid of Bacchus, which Anacreon has described as being such an incentive to love, all of which fired his blood and infused poison into his mind.

Ardent almost bewailed the peculiarity of his disposition, which urged him to fly from what others would have sought with avidity, and considered as the choicest blessings which fortune could have bestowed on her favourites. These thoughts so harassed his mind, that by way of relieving and diverting his overcharged and oppressed faculties, he resolved to mount his horse and sally forth, in the hope that fresh air and change of scene would calm and strengthen his perturbed spirits. Ardent accordingly mounted his Bucephalus, and, sallying forth, traversed hill and dale, path and waste, in search of that serenity which, like an *ignis fatuus*, seemed to fly in proportion to his pursuit. In this phantom chase he passed some hours, but, on his return, when he was about descending a high hill, chance, or a

still more wicked sprite, seemed determined to scatter all his wise resolves to the desert air ; for, in the distance, ascending an opposite hill, leading to the happy valley, he beheld the two identical objects who had caused him so much toil and trouble of mind and resolution to avoid, and, in a moment, all his wise resolves were put to flight, and he thought only of how he could reach them in the speediest manner. Therefore, animating his horse to his utmost speed, he rushed on, regardless of obstacles, to the endangering of himself and horse ; for he had not proceeded more than half a mile, when he suddenly found himself and steed plunged in the midst of a miry bog, the unfortunate animal being immersed nearly to his girths. To extricate himself from this difficulty, he naturally plunged and struggled, with strenuous efforts to free himself and rider from the impending danger ; such vigorous exertions, as may be supposed, tended to bedeck Ardent, in a very liberal manner, with Nature's brown or black livery ; for of bog mud or swamp he had an abundant shower before the superior strength and wisdom of the horse had extricated them from that difficulty into which the heedless

rider had impelled them both. At length, having gained *terra firma*, or the brow of the opposite hill, he again discerned the ladies he was in quest of, or, rather, the beings who were the then innocent cause of his disastrous exploit. A few seconds more brought him within conversational reach of the ladies, whose attention he endeavoured to attract by saying, "A fine evening for your walk, ladies," but they replied not. Ardent, undaunted by their taciturnity, again endeavoured to attract their attention by exclaiming, "Behold, ladies, the plight to which you have reduced one who is always eager to pay his earliest devoirs to you." Still they were silent, and Ardent continued, "What am I to augur from this silence? Are ye spirits of the heath? or phantoms who have assumed the forms of two beautiful mortals, whose very appearance not only lead the senses captive, but lures the body also through bogs of mud and mire; say, why have ye assumed these appearances? Are ye in quest of true love? if so, behold in me the truest lover that ever surrendered his heart to a beautiful but capricious mistress. Or are ye in quest of one in the full possession of the faculties of sober

reason? if so, again I say, look on me, and behold one who once possessed them, and who would still possess them, had it not been for the lovely mortal whose form one of ye have usurped.” To this half-serious, half-ludicrous harangue, the ladies were still silent; Mrs. Lovely looked round, smiled, but spoke not, perhaps out of delicacy to Mrs. Freelove. Therefore, Ardent left them and taciturnity together—they descended into the happy valley, and himself galloped homeward.”

On his return home, Ardent revolved in his mind his own conduct this evening, and also that of his tantalizing yet bewitching acquaintance. He certainly felt somewhat surprised at the inconsistency of his heart and mind, and that the resolutions he had formed in the morning should be so dispelled by the evening, merely on beholding the objects which he had determined to avoid. During his ideas of reformation in the morning, he would have considered the silent neglect of these ladies as a blessing, yet, so powerless is reason when opposed by inclination, he certainly felt somewhat piqued this evening at their conduct; but with a facility so natural to infatuation,

he strove to place their conduct towards himself in as favourable a light as possible.

He fancied that the smile of Mrs. Lovely proved that she was not angry with his long lecture on morals, and apparent insensibility of conduct, the preceding evening. But he perceived by Mrs. Freelove's manner, that she had neither forgotten or forgiven his unintentional offence towards herself; he fancied she must have overheard a part, or, perhaps, the whole of his conversation with Mrs. Lovely. If so, he could not be surprised at her present manner towards him, or, indeed, displeased at it; for it indicated a prudent resolve to be more guarded in her conduct in future; and, in fact, would be giving her a lesson which would save both him and herself much pain, and, perhaps, altercation in future. After having settled their conduct this evening so far to his satisfaction, he again reviewed his own, and could not help smiling at the headlong impetuosity of his disposition, which caused him to seek, through bog and mire, that which a few hours before he had conceived he would have gone through mire and bog to avoid. And while changing his sullied garments and

purifying himself from the baptismal blessing which his horse had so lavishly bestowed, recalled to his mind an incident which had befallen him some few weeks previous: while walking with his friend, Mr. Rhymer, he beheld something white and glistening in the sun, which, in a place so little visited by human footsteps as that wild part of the heath, his heated imagination concluded could be no one else than Mrs. Freelove, in her white bonnet; and immediately, without communicating his intentions to his friend Rhymer, he flew off, with the speed of a greyhound, towards the attractive object, but was suddenly stopped, by finding himself up to his knees in a swamp, when, judge of his mortification, he then discerned, by the approach of the object in question, that so far from its being his lovely Arcadian goddess, with a white bonnet to protect her beautiful features from the sun, it was no other than a poor turf-cutter, with the instrument of his occupation upon his shoulder,—namely, a turf-cutter's spade; which, reflecting the rays of the setting sun, threw a deceptive reflection on the visual organs of Ardent, aided, as they were, by the extreme distance and his heated imagination.

His friend Rhymer, as might be expected, laughed very heartily at the awkward situation in which the impetuosity of Ardent, guided by the little blind god, had plunged him ; at the same time rallying him on his adventure, and reminding him, that if he had stayed to consult with one whose optics were not obscured by the illusions of love, he could have saved him from his unnecessary start, by the information that the object he beheld was merely a poor turf-cutter, returning homewards after the toils and fatigues of the day. Ardent certainly rejoiced that his friend was not a witness of this fresh proof of his folly, which he had exhibited this evening ; especially combined as it was with the apparent coolness of Mrs. Freelove, which would have given ample scope to his friend's powers of raillery, as well as afforded him a boundless theme for expatiating on lovers' quarrels, &c. ; and which he would not have failed to recapitulate to his friend Foresight, if not assisted to enliven and make merry the whole village at the expense of Ardent.

The illusory visions of artificial love, called by all writers who have treated upon these subjects infatuating or infatuation, occupy the noblest

faculties of the soul, and seemingly realize, for the time being, those illusory fancies so contradictory to human probability and rational happiness. In the struggle to comprehend the real and obvious contradictions, improbabilities, and inconsistencies, the mind becomes enfeebled by the attempt to develop the hidden mysteries and dreams of the human heart and head, when preparing for seduction, by artificial blandishments of manners, person, and fortune, all of which have more or less their subordinate parts to fill, as personages in a well-appointed drama; all move as if by springs, and are subordinate agents to the master-spirit directing their operations to their allotted stations. So that rational man, when he gets into these mazes and labyrinths of love, is bewildered, perplexed, confounded; and happy is he who can escape from the enchantment that surrounds him, without becoming the victim of illicit indulgence in the unlawful passion. The delicate perceptions of propriety are lost—the mind that gave dignity to man is no more—and the man of principle, after struggling for the mastery, is lost in the voluptuary; the one part of him, endowed with wisdom, contending against

the other, the animal frame, which is possessed with a frailty incident to mortality when taking a wrong bent or bias, like Ardent, who was now fast approaching to the grand climax of his indiscretions. Principles and indiscretions by turns assailed him, like wind raising the waves of the ocean ; the mind became tossed, as a ship on the waters of the deep, the fickleness of that element presenting no bad emblem of woman's love and inconstancy when improperly directed.

CHAPTER VI.

ARDENT's mind did not long continue in that state of satisfaction into which he had argued it after his late adventure ; this was by no means surprising, for his conscience told him that his conduct in this affair would not bear submitting to the scrutinizing test of reason ; he felt dissatisfied with himself, but more so with the fair and perplexing object of his attachment. The natural integrity of his mind convinced him that there was something wrong, or why all this state of suspicion and disquiet ? He felt there must be a cause, and reflection whispered to him, that if he could not discover or develope that cause, he ought, in justice to his own honour, to abandon so imprudent a connexion.

But how was this to be accomplished, when the " still small voice" of reason was drowned in the loud and more imperative tones of infatuated inclinations. He fancied himself unequal to the conflict, yet felt that he ought to undertake it ; he

was aware, if he sought the advice of a friend, what that friend's counsel would be, and he feared that his heart and mind were not sufficiently independent to take it. Indeed, he never recalled the suspicion of his friend Foresight to mind, but he felt an uneasiness that amounted almost to agony; then, again, the suspicions of Mrs. Lovely but too well coincided with the opinions of his friend Foresight, which by no means tended to increase the tranquillity of his mind. Herself and excellence he had associated together, and it was painful in the extreme to dispossess himself of that idea. She had proposed marriage, which seemed to contradict the opinions entertained of her by Mr. Foresight and Mrs. Lovely: but time, that brings all things to light, would doubtless unravel the mystery, for a mystery there apparently was, as all things seemed to confirm, but of what nature that mystery might be, was then impossible to divine; and yet Ardent appeared to himself more or less to be connected with its unravelling or disclosure—certainly, not exactly with his own free will, for he was, in general, indifferent to secrets of any kind, knowing full well the attendant consequences of being

the repository of mysterious truths connected with any individual ; and he particularly dreaded, yet, at the same time wished, to learn the secrets connected with this bower of what seemed to him a Mohammedan paradise.

A whole week of mental conflict passed over the head of Ardent, during which time he abstained from visiting the attractive spot, and the still more seductively attractive mistress of it ; and the end of the week found him in the same state of indecision as the beginning. He found that absence, so far from curing the uneasiness and anxiety of his mind, tended rather to increase it ; and he argued himself into a belief that an interview with her would chase away every doubt and uneasiness from it. Indeed, he fancied it was doing her an injustice to entertain such suspicions, without informing her of the nature of his doubts ; for, after all, the hints of Mrs. Lovely might arise from nothing more than the ill-natured envy of a rival beauty, and who, to judge from appearances, would by no means object to place herself in the same kind of situation as that of Mrs. Freelove.

Ardent continued his train of ideas, till he actually fancied he was injuring an amiable woman, in only surmising she might be a vicious character ; and his wayward mind at length reasoned itself into a conviction that she was really as amiable as she had appeared to him to be on their first acquaintance. Besides, her regret of the indiscretion into which she had fallen through her acquaintance with him, argued, as he imagined, anything but a depravity of mind ; especially when he considered her dread of the consequences of that indiscretion, and her resolution not only to reform herself, but her exhortations to him to follow the same wholesome example, and think of her in future in no other light than that of friendship. Indeed, this latter sentiment he thought would be more conducive to the peace of mind and welfare of both, than the turbulent passion of love, which had distracted them so much, and from which dilemma they both sought the means of extricating themselves : and Ardent fancied that, by strictly adhering to the rules prescribed by friendship alone, he could enjoy the sweets of her society without the bitter anxieties of love,

which they had both of them so wofully experienced. In fact, he imagined they might now gather the rose without the thorn.

How all these fine ideas were realized, will be discovered in the sequel; but such is the disposition of the mind of man, when not actually depraved, he is no sooner sensible of his errors, than he is uneasy that his judgment should have been subordinate to his passions, and that the animal influence has triumphed over the mental; he then endeavours to correct his irregular desires and inclinations, by way of bringing them under the control of his judgment—if he succeeds, he may be considered happy, but if not, he is completely the reverse.

Friendship, or regard for a worthy female, yields the most rational delight and satisfaction, but with the abandoned and profligate, the virtuous mind experiences the most agonizing sensations; indeed, it is surprising how the virtuous mind can become so entangled in the snares of the wanton. But their *finesse* somewhat resembles the art of a juggler, who prefers practising upon the ignorant and unsuspecting, for in them credulity gives the illusions effect, and what to them

at first appeared simple and harmless, becomes, as with gaming, the most ruinous, not to the peace of mind alone, but to the fortunes also.

In obedience to his last-formed resolves, he prepared to visit Mrs. Freelove, in the hope that every doubt and anxiety would be dispelled by that step ; therefore, with a heart somewhat lightened by the thought of once more beholding his beloved fair one, he sallied forth again to visit the too attractive spot—but of the interview that followed we will speak in the following chapter.

CHAPTER VII.

As Ardent approached the house, his heart palpitated when he thought of the reception the lady might give him, after the peremptory manner in which he had been dismissed a few days previous. But as the interview was an ordeal which he had determined to go through, he summoned up his courage for the occasion, and advanced towards her dwelling with something like the feelings of a man about to be put upon his trial. Having arrived in the presence of the lady, he was agreeably surprised to find, instead of expressing anger and astonishment at his re-appearance contrary to her prohibition, that she accosted him in the following manner—"Bless, me, Ardent! why, you have been absent an age,—I could not have supposed you would have stayed away so long; and how altered you are in appearance! Surely, you have not been so simple as to grieve and fret at my forbidding you to see me again,

when you ought to have known I only did it to try how long you could endure to be absent from me, which, by the by, has certainly been of longer duration than I expected."

"You are pleased to be merry, Mrs. Freelove, and appear to take pleasure in sporting with the agony of another: have you forgotten the vehemence and peremptory manner in which you forbade me again to appear before you? I have hitherto obeyed you, but could not forbear calling once more to take a friendly leave, for I felt it too painful to part in anger."

"Mercy on me! why, you have been much more obedient than was necessary; I am sure I could not have supposed you would have stayed away so long. And why, let me ask you, did not the spirit move you to make this very doleful farewell call before now?"

"Why, then, to confess the truth, I should have done so, but a host of conflicting passions assailed me by turns, for I was very unhappy out of your society; with you I am tranquil, away from you I am miserable; you have a strange influence over me, which I know not how to account for; I can exist with your friendship, but, I fear, not

without it ; indeed, I am ashamed of the weakness that influences my conduct."

" Poor fellow ! your case is truly pitiable, and your face is no bad representation of the knight of the doleful countenance, which expression, I think, it has worn long enough. Therefore, I beg it may be substituted by one of a more cheerful cast ; for I have forgiven all your past misdeeds, although I was very angry at the speedy and strong acquaintance you were forming with Mrs. Lovely, and the marked neglect you in consequence showed towards me ; but she is a very charming woman, and I certainly would not have exposed you to the influence of her charms, knowing, from the inflammability of your nature, how very susceptible you are of love and beauty ; besides, I was angry at her sending expressly for you, in spite of my reluctance and opposition."

" You really were very considerate on my behalf, but there was no cause for such apprehension ; for my heart was not only preoccupied by yourself, but I was likewise aware of the lady being married, which precluded the idea of thinking of her in any way but with respect."

" Admirably argued, Ardent ; I was not aware

that the mere sentiment of respect alone would occupy the attention of a young man and a beautiful woman in a moonlight *tête-a-tête* for three hours ; really, you and the lady must have possessed large portions of spiritual grace to have kept your conversation and conduct within the boundary of respect. But, however, I did not think you would have considered my prohibition in so serious a light, for my anger was more assumed than real, and I am not ashamed to confess that I have been punished by it as much as yourself ; yet I dared not send for you during Mrs. Lovely's stay, lest she should attempt to renew her intimacy with you ; therefore, for both your sakes, I kept you apart ; but she left me this morning, and bade me remember her to you."

" I am obliged to the lady for her remembrance of me, and must also return thanks to yourself, I presume, for putting your liberality so to the test as to deliver her message. And now let me express my regret for the apparent rudeness and indiscretion of the lady and myself on that unfortunate evening."

" Speak of it no more, Ardent—you have viewed my assumed anger in too serious a light. Mrs.

Lovely and myself have since been highly amused at your expense, to think how easy you could fall into the snare which she laid for you, and by your really imagining that your virtue, like that of Joseph Andrews, was in actual danger; for, to let you into a secret, her advances towards yourself were merely counterfeit, for the purpose of proving your outrageous chastity, at the same time she candidly confessed that you possessed her unbounded esteem, and had she been single and at liberty, it might, in all likelihood, have been something more than esteem."

"Really, I ought to be much obliged to the lady's excessive candour, for such I must think it, as she had previously confessed the same to me, after a much slighter acquaintance than had passed betwixt you and myself; and it required little discernment to see that, where the fruit was so ripe, a very slight shaking of the tree would speedily have brought it into the ardent lover's lap. As it is, I still congratulate myself that I can review my conduct with that lady without a blush; for I have always entertained the opinion that the marriage vow was too sacred a compact to be invaded, and it never can be infringed but

at the peril and great discomfiture of the parties, if not their final ruin, and, whatever may be the fate of Mrs. Lovely, I thank Heaven no blame can be imputed to me on her account."

"Whatever may be the fate of Mrs. Lovely—and what, think you, will be her fate? Upon my word, Ardent, I shall begin to think you are out-doing me in looking at the gloomy side of things: I wonder you do not begin to prognosticate something about my fate."

"Why, then, to be serious, my mind has not been altogether easy of late on your account; and as it is my most anxious wish that you should be respected and thought respectable by every one, I have been made exceedingly unhappy by hearing of some unpleasant rumours which are in circulation respecting yourself."

"And for which calumnies you eagerly inquire, by way of increasing their circulation: let me tell you, Ardent, before you came to the village I was happy, but I am now, alas! quite the contrary. I could then derive amusement from my flower-garden, or in a lonely walk or ride; indeed, I was never at a loss for diversion and agreeable ideas, but now I am neither easy in your presence

or absence, for when you are away time passes so heavily that I count the momentary ticking of the clock ; its melancholy sound reminds me of the ticking of the death-watch ; and when I retire to my pillow, my dreams are of such fearful omen, that, combined with my other forebodings, I think I shall not live long ; and when the clock strikes, during the dark hours of the night, it resounds through my lonely roof like a summons to another, and, I sincerely hope, a better world, for I have been most vilely calumniated in this."

"Then why not, Mrs. Freelove, give me, as your friend, an opportunity of refuting these calumnies, which I should be most happy to do."

"Impossible, Ardent ; I shall be displeased by your pressing the subject further. I do not deny that there is a mystery hangs over me, which will remain suspended and undisclosed until my death ; with this, Ardent, you should be satisfied, for even this I would not have admitted to any other man than you. Besides, I acknowledged to you before, that I once had a husband"—here she burst into tears—"but I must say, that all my present unhappiness is owing to you."

“ Nay, Mrs. Freelove, I cannot think that ; I should rather imagine it is chiefly occasioned by some painful recollections connected with your husband, who, perhaps, came to some unfortunate end, such as falling in a duel or on the field of battle. You do not contradict me ; therefore, I presume my conjecture is too true.”

“ Have you no mercy, Ardent, on my feelings ? you intend, I believe, to drive me distracted. I fear I must leave the village, and desert all I hold dear, to avoid you, and, retiring to some lone spot, bury myself and sorrows from your unfeeling intrusion.”

“ I have no wish, madam, to drive you to such an alternative, and, rather than be the cause of molestation to you, I will banish myself from your presence in future ; indeed, I came with the intention of taking my leave of you, and, at the same time, offer that counsel which it is the duty of a friend to do. I know you will deem me an officious one, and my advice unnecessary, but it is nevertheless sincere, and my concern for your welfare makes me disregard the construction you may place on my motives for so doing. My

advice, then, in the first place, is, that you have no gentlemen visit you unaccompanied by their wives."

"You are jealous, Ardent, and that jealousy will certainly be the ruin of me: but, however, let me hear what you have further to say, for I suspect that it is only the beginning of some very mysterious charges or warnings."

"Well, then, in the next place, why make such a mystery with the visits of your uncle, and who, you say, is also your son's guardian? It really is quite unnecessary in such near relationship, and is converting a plain and honourable acquaintance and connexion, into one of an apparently suspicious nature."

"Why, that is very true, Ardent,—it certainly is unnecessary; but, somehow or other, it is his wish to be private when in the country, as he does not desire to be visited by any of the families in the neighbourhood; at least, I conceive that to be the principal reason. It certainly is an odd whim, and I have often rallied him upon it, but without any effect, for he still wishes to remain unknown in these parts; besides, he derives some amusement in baffling the prying

curiosity of the inhabitants of this village, who think they have a right to be made acquainted with the birth, parentage, and education of every one who comes among them, but, as he thinks otherwise, he takes a delight in disappointing them, and smiles at their restless and excited curiosity. I have heard that Mr. Foresight has for a long time headed this inquisitive host, and made many, repeated, and anxious inquiries, the result of which has not been very gratifying, I believe, to his curiosity."

"Perhaps not, madam ; but this I can tell you, that your letters, both those which come to, as well as go from you, have been opened by some still more inquisitive person than your neighbour Foresight, with the view, no doubt, of discovering your carefully guarded secret."

"Good Heavens ! is it possible ? However, I have suspected as much for some time past ; therefore, I have sent them to my son, to put into the nearest post to himself, at least some miles from this village, by way of baffling my Argus-eyed neighbours. But I will thank you to favour me with your authority, that I may take steps adequate to the punishment of such outrageous

curiosity; although I believe their curiosity has not been gratified by the discovery of the much-wished-for secret."

"As to that, madam, I can only refer you to rumour, which has as many tongues as your Argus-like neighbours have eyes. I must say I felt a curiosity as to this secret myself, but then my inquiries have been principally confined to you, and, as you have hitherto maintained the secret inviolable, and with a constancy which is generally considered unusual in your sex, I have given up all expectations of hearing more than that the gentleman is your uncle and guardian to your son. And now, as I know the subject may very naturally be supposed to give you uneasiness, I will discontinue my inquiry of yourself, at least for the present."

"An admirable resolve, Ardent, for, as you would never find it out, it would be labour lost and curiosity ill-applied."

"Perhaps so, madam, and I will even admit that the inquiry is impertinent, obtrusive, offensive, and may be even insolent; yet I think it would have been attended with no harm if you had given the gentleman a name of some sort or

other, for, owing to their ignorance of his real name, some of the inhabitants of this village have given him the *nom-du-guerre* of Mr. Nobody, while others, not satisfied with so palpable a misnomer, have styled him, somewhat more properly, a Mr. Somebody."

"Really, the folly of these people is almost laughable, but, as I am now tired of the subject, I insist on your dropping it: pray, are there any other heinous charges you have to make?"

"Why, yes, there is one other circumstance, that is, I believe, a little unusual in a lady's house, especially in the chamber of a lady of your profound pretensions to sanctity, chastity, and all the virtues attached to single blessedness."

"Well, and what have you seen in that chamber to astonish you so much? Is it my pretty flowery or rosy bed that offends your Quaker-like ideas of simplicity?"

"Not exactly that; but I have observed a door of communication from your best bed-room to your own chamber, which leaves your fortress or rosy bed very open to attack, and endangers the surrendering of its fair inhabitant, with or without discretion."

“ Really, Ardent, I know not whether to laugh or scold at your drawing such conclusions from so trifling a circumstance as that of a communication between two rooms, which was merely contrived to admit of the servants passing through the house with the greater facility.”

“ Very ingeniously parried, madam, upon my word;—the stratagems of love in both sexes are numerous—Jupiter was a very Proteus in this art;—but to bring the simile nearer to yourself, the fair Helen of Greece disliked to lie alone, so that her visitor, Paris, took compassion on her forlorn situation, and, by so doing, involved the whole of his family in total ruin, besides the destruction of their country.”

“ That your imagination may not stray farther, I will humour you so far as to inform you that I keep the key of that door myself; therefore, none can enter my sanctum, unless I please.”

“ That, fair lady, I readily believe; but, were I your husband, and should not know when you please, I would, previous to any unavoidable absence, have that door very properly substituted by a very liberal allowance of bricks and mortar; and not, like Blue Beard, leave the key in your

custody with an injunction only, let that injunction be ever so terrible."

"But as you are not my husband, Ardent, your proposed plans are quite superfluous. I am the guardian of my own chastity, and care not for you or your insinuations."

"So I perceive, madam, but I merely stated what I conceived would be to your advantage and respectability in life; and also what I should have done had I been your husband—which event is now never likely to be realized. At the same time, I repeat, I would not only have that door blocked up, but would have every aperture in the four sides of your bed-room hermetically sealed; there should not be the smallest chink through which a whisper might be conveyed; and as for a keyhole, I should fancy that to be an immense space, through which a host of elves, sylphs, or gnomes might pass in the dark, and surprise you in your slumbers."

"Which would be very terrible indeed; and, as you have conjured up so many dangers to which I may be exposed, you, perhaps, feel heroic enough to perform the office of protector or guardian of my chamber, and will zealously

undertake to shield me from such terrible assaults."

This was a sort of puzzling question, that would have pozed many a stronger resolution than Ardent's; and, as the curious readers of the male sex may wish to be informed of the answer he gave, he refers them to the imperfection of the human character, at the same time observing, that while Ardent endeavoured to think right, he occasionally swerved in his actions, and which his better judgment condemned.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE reader will perceive that Ardent was overthrown by the very reasoning he had made use of when endeavouring to persuade his fair but artful mistress to emerge from the incognito state which she had hitherto so industriously, or rather, mysteriously observed, baffling the penetration of every one, even the most sagacious heads, whether male or female, in the whole village, although, perhaps, the former were not very much inclined to annoy a lady, whose undisputed pretensions to personal beauty and attractions few could resist, more especially those who were exposed to her plausible and seductive manners.

But as for Ardent, he felt himself compelled to silence, unless he would forfeit his character; therefore, taciturnity for a time governed his tongue, and would, perhaps, have continued so to do, but such sort of intimacies are not calculated to prosper: the female mind, when it has once passed the bounds of propriety, becomes

gradually abandoned, and the same experiment is frequently tried over again to seduce other characters, until the nuisance becomes dangerous and unbearable; and he that may have honour enough not to divulge or make an idle talk of those indiscretions, which, perhaps, exist only between himself and his erring companion, may, at the same time, have principle sufficient to prevent others from falling into those snares which had so distressed his own peace.

Such was the situation of Ardent and Mrs. Freelove,—he had too much generosity to betray her secret, while he fancied the delinquency existed only between themselves; but, at the same time, he possessed too much principle to encourage her in the practice of making fresh proselytes to her charms or wily seductions. Ardent considered the mildest course he could take, was to reason with her upon the consequences of such practice, with the view and hope of gradually reclaiming her, and thus render her less mischievous to herself and society. But those who endeavour to reclaim a vicious woman, may as well attempt to stay the raging blast; for what can stem the career of vice, until it actually stops

of itself, from pure inability to proceed further? and which is generally caused by loss of fortune, or, by sinking to the lowest state of prostitution, become too disgusting to proceed further. In that state, perhaps, they are not much regarded, but even then they possess more or less of a pernicious tendency, by undermining moral virtue, and seducing from the virtuous maiden those rights allotted to her by nature, and the usages of civil society, by the bonds of marriage, which are, or should be, the most perfect cement of lasting friendship and esteem.

It was with such reasoning as this that Ardent pass'd the cooler and isolated moments of sober reflection; his mind was ever engaged on the probability of events, and which at last determined him to risk her displeasure once again, by having a serious conversation with her, and by showing the danger she ran of sinking the respectable part of her character. It was a most ungallant and a very unusual proceeding for a lover to attempt to reform the vices of his mistress, although many would wish to control them to their own individual selves. But Ardent had a higher object in view: that was, to induce her to

become the respectable lady she represented herself to be in society,—patroness of the Sunday School and other charities which did her infinite credit; it was these virtues that had attracted Ardent's friendship and admiration, until it ripened into love. He was inclined to believe that any indiscretion she might practise, arose from a want of consideration of the consequences attending irresolution; and could her mind be brought into activity, the probability, Ardent thought, was, that it would triumph over her vices. At all events he conceived it to be but an act of kindness and duty to state his views and reasoning upon them, and endeavour, before it was too late, to impress on her mind the importance of them, if not for her own sake alone, at least, for that of her son; and which argumentative colloquy will be found in the next chapter.

CHAPTER IX.

ARDENT was aware that the task he was about to undertake, of expostulating with his fair mistress, was apparently an ungracious, if not an ungrateful one; yet the necessity of so doing forced itself so strongly upon his mind, that he resolved to wave all feelings of minor importance, and centre his efforts in the stronger one of endeavouring to save the woman he still loved, notwithstanding her faults, from ruin and infamy. Therefore, arousing his courage to aid him in this delicate undertaking, he repaired to the house of his fair but frail idol, where being arrived, and every prefatory and preliminary being duly gone through, Ardent began his lecture or expostulation in the following manner:—

“ You will pardon me, Mrs. Freelove, for the liberty I am about to take in giving that advice which is neither sought or wished for on your part, but which may not be the less necessary on that account.”

“ For heaven’s sake, Ardent, to what does all this disagreeably round-about preamble tend ? I thought I had heard all the charges you had to make against me, the last time we met ; however, let me hear what fresh enormity I have to answer for ? ”

“ Nay, dear madam, those you allude to will form a sufficient subject for debate without adding to their number, and we will now, if you please, argue the affair in a casuistical and dispassionate manner ; or, if you please, I will treat it as a case of conscience, in which I am not individually concerned or interested, except as a friend who would wish to check, by timely interference, that fate that may await you, but which a prudent, guarded, and correct conduct may prevent altogether ; but if such is not attended to, a change in public as well as private opinion will surely take place, and when they coalesce, you will no longer be respected or considered respectable. But before I proceed farther, it may perhaps be necessary to speak a word or two respecting myself, which is, I by no means wish to imply that I am more infallible than other men, or that I should think of recriminating upon you that with

which I am perhaps partly chargeable myself; and now, having admitted that I am not a perfect character, or one who has never erred, yet my failings have not blinded me to the strong necessity there is that I should exert my feelings of consideration, humanity, and friendship in your behalf, and stand your friend as far as is possibly consistent with the public safety. It is my most anxious desire that you should continue your present respectability of station in society, and not sacrifice that share of public approbation which you still deservedly merit and possess, from the many kind and beneficent services you have rendered to the poorer classes of the village and its environs. By way of adding strength to my exhortation, let me entreat you to divest yourself of the idea that it is your lover and associate in folly who is giving you this counsel, but consider me in the light of a sage and experienced friend, who is exceedingly interested in your welfare, and who would therefore argue this affair between yourself and the public opinion as seriously as possible; for public opinion should certainly be respected, at least by those who possess any regard for reputation or character, for their

censure is severe when provoked, consequently it should be avoided, if possible, by practising any justifiable means to secure or conciliate their good opinion. In your complaints, you say a certain lover of yours, who is Ardent by nature as well as name, is jealous of you, and that that jealousy will be your ruin. Now, I wish to prevent its becoming your ruin, or, indeed, that of his own, and yet I fear, so long as a plurality of lovers are indulged in, that plurality will overwhelm both yourself and him; for you are not to consider him as an abandoned young man,—no, far from it, for had he been so, I trust you would have been the first to have contemned him; neither, on the other hand, do I think you would wish Mr. Ardent to think of you as an abandoned woman, in whom is no rule, no government, no discretion, or guidance, and who is lost to every sense of shame and propriety; a single fall into an inadvertence, although not to be justified, is one thing, but a continuance in the practice, and particularly with many, is another, and cannot be too severely stigmatized. I am aware, indeed, that there have been some whose laxity of morals and opinions have led them to think, that living in a

state of nature—that is, without the marriage tie, was but a venial sin, but the church do not, and they are, properly speaking, the guardians of morality, and they call it a flagrant sin, and deserving of severe reprobation at the least; but when multiplied, becomes altogether completely indefensible, and, as I am no advocate for sin and immorality, I cannot even suppose that such a disreputable conduct can be attempted to be justified by any one who has the least respect for themselves or others. And now, with respect to your reputation and the appearances connected therewith, I will beg leave, then, in the first place, to enter my decided protest against plurality of lovers, under any denomination whatever, whether platonic or any other name still more indefinite, and which are only assumed for the same reason that a deformed person would put on a gay cloak, that it may assist to hide or disguise deformity. Indeed, I would have all marks or indications of love avoided, where marriage is not intended to cement the union; nay, even your Uncle Toby himself (I will borrow a name for him from Sterne, as he appears to be lamentably in want of one which is really his own), I say, then,

I would have even your Uncle Toby make his appearance here in a less questionable shape than he has hitherto done, for at present I can hardly persuade myself to think of him as a really moral character, or why be so mysterious in his conduct? There are many others, also, of the opposite sex to yourself, who, although I believe them to be really worthy moral characters in themselves, yet may not always be safe visitors to an attractive and solitary female, for Cupid often takes delight in turning the head of the most profound and sapient when in the presence of a lovely woman, into a spinning-top, for the diversion of himself and the lady, the urchin chuckling with delight on beholding the unseemly vagaries of the sage toy, when, intoxicated with such unusual excitement and evolutions, he falls at last, and lays his glory prostrate at the feet of his fascinating charmer and her mischievous ally. I now come to the arrangement of your chamber, which is certainly somewhat unusual, especially for a lady with your pretensions to sanctity. Dr. Allworthy would say it ill accords with the holy texts or precepts of Scripture, which you ought to know says, ‘Mortify the flesh and the pride of

life,' &c. Now, be serious while I tell you that the light and volatile smile at your ingenuity and confidence in your fancied security, while those of a graver cast of mind and character are more censorious, whether with cause or not, remains between God and yourself, but all fancy they discern an ill-concealed impropriety of conduct. Let me tell you, there are not many women, and particularly pretty women, like you, that dare trust themselves so near the male sex without having a stronger barrier than a mere lock and key. The facility of access is too easy and too liable to be abused : a vigorous young man, on finding the trifling nature of the impediment, would instantly devise the means of storming your fortress, when a successful assault on your virtue would surely be the consequence, which, although perhaps you would not excessively grieve or repine at, would certainly not tend to increase your credit or respectability, as it would be considered that you exposed yourself to unnecessary danger. Therefore, let me advise you to fasten up that door of communication in a more secure manner than merely locking it, and by so doing you will be removing some of the obstacles which

now lie in the way of your reputation as a truly pious and virtuous lady."

"My patience will hold out no longer ; have done, Ardent, with this foolery, and let me hear no more from my sage and experienced friend, who, by the by, I conceive to be no better than a downright officious and troublesome simpleton, and who, I should imagine, has passed the age of pleasureable feelings and ideas, and having supplied their place with a parcel of musty maxims and sentiments, worthy of the veriest old fogrum in the world, wishes, by dealing them forth to others, to prevent their enjoying those delights which he either will not or cannot participate in longer ; so, now a truce with further lecturing and speechifying, but resume your natural character, and once more, as my friend and lover, Ardent, hear what I have to say. Now confess, would not you like to marry a pretty woman with a good fortune, whose rosy bed and sofa you could lounge your weary limbs upon, besides all the other accompaniments of unbounded love?"

"I will be candid, Mrs. Freelove : if you mean yourself, I answer decidedly and without hesitation—certainly not."

“What! all those desirable things I have mentioned have no charms for you; that is very extraordinary. Pray, is it because they are accompanied with the shackles of matrimony?”

“No, Mrs. Freelove; to the shackles of matrimony, as you term them, I have, thank heaven, too much principle to object; and were you the being my ardent imagination first represented you to be, I could gladly have united with you in the strongest ties or bonds which religion, honour, and the laws of our country could have devised, for I candidly confess that, when I first beheld you, you prepossessed me beyond any woman I had ever before seen; my feelings were such as I could not explain, although I have since discovered them to have been those of infatuation.”

“Well, Mr. Fickle, and so you have now altered your opinion of me, and would not enter into that compact with me which at one time you would have considered as the summit of earthly happiness, and which, I believe, you will not attempt to deny. Now, what can you say to justify such a changeable and fickle disposition?”

“You ask what I have to say, Mrs. Freelove, but had you put that question to your own heart,

it would have saved me the pain of answering ; it would have told you, that when you first appeared to me, it was as a pretty woman, whose conduct was guided by religion, and consequently by virtue, which I knew were great securities to a husband's honour. Those virtues gave you, in my opinion, a particular interest ; they flung around you that halo, if I may so express myself, which should be the inseparable accompaniment of beauty, and which every woman who has good sense and discretion will never be deficient in, especially if she wishes to recommend herself to the approbation of the most worthy. But a woman who could merely assume those virtues for the special purpose of hiding the deformity of illicit love, and that I fear not with one alone, but with many, may serve very well as a wife for those unscrupulous gentlemen who have no objection to wear the branching honours of the forehead, especially when tipped with gold ; nay, there are some, I have heard, who, in addition to gold, have them also set with diamonds. But, as I am not ambitious of wearing such badges of my own and wife's infamy, or indeed of obtaining any honours but such as I

may derive from my own merits, the talents and services of such a wife would be wholly wasted upon me."

"Very pretty, upon my word; truly, I am surprised at my own patience in sitting to hear such language; but, however, as it would be a pity to stop such a flow of eloquence before it has exhausted itself, pray go on, and let me hear all you have to say upon what appears to you so fruitful a topic."

"I will not trespass much longer on your patience, but proceed to the end of my discourse, by saying that, as a lover, I could not endure a rival; there are some who do not appreciate the qualification of chastity in a woman, but I think it one of her most powerful recommendations, and the strongest security to her husband's honour and children's welfare. An honourable lover requires steadiness of principles in her who possesses his affections, that she should love him and him alone, without a division of those smiles and attentions he believes to belong exclusively to himself, and to the entire disregard of the professions of another. This may constitute a virtuous attachment, but all others must be erroneous, and

too ill-founded to promote either private or public happiness. I regret that there appears to have been a very great mistake in the nature of our acquaintance: I have been seeking for a wife, while you, I apprehend, too late for my own peace, were seeking for a gallant, and in me, I am ashamed to say, found one, to the overthrow, I fear, of my own peace and my father's expectations of me."

"So, then, Ardent, you think I am not sincere, and are also foolish enough not only to listen to the false and scandalous reports in circulation respecting me, but likewise to believe them?"

"Really, my dear madam, I cannot think that all the assertions and insinuations I have heard can have arisen without some foundation in truth; would you but clear up some of these mysteries, I would still defend you against unfounded calumnies, as your warmest and most zealous friend."

"Leave me, Ardent, unless you wish to see me expire with grief and indignation; I feel too well that my prophetic forebodings will be realized, and you will hasten my career in this world by what you may choose to call a performance of your duty, although I can call it nothing else than

an ill-natured and selfish knight errantry. Leave me, I say, for I cannot endure more."

"I am sorry, madam, to have hurt your feelings, but I had hoped you would have felt convinced that my argument was reasonable. Farewell, and believe me to be your well-wishing friend."

Ardent then left the lady, grieved at heart with the small prospect of success which his expostulations appeared to meet with. After his departure, the lady sat for a minute or two, with a countenance inflamed by anger and contempt, and then exclaimed, "How could I have been so thoughtless and short-sighted! when I first spread my net to catch this non-descript being, I ought to have foreseen that his troublesome and obstinate propensity to the plain strait line would cause him to flounder and struggle so perseveringly in the net, that in his endeavours to free himself, he would drag me down the stream of destruction with him. Heigho! I must now go and offer up my prayers to Venus to extricate me, her zealous votary, from this dilemma, or entangle this stubborn infidel more securely."

CHAPTER X.

THE reader may very possibly suppose, that after the conversation or expostulation which passed between the lovers, as related in the preceding chapter, Ardent would have gradually declined in his visits to his fair, but dangerous and perplexing acquaintance; but such was by no means the case: her assertions of innocence and constant denial of the reports in circulation respecting her, none of which, by the way, had been proved, somewhat staggered Ardent, and he felt that he had possibly been too hasty in admitting for actual realities, what may have been only accidental circumstances and coincidences; and if such was really the fact, he felt grieved that he should have wounded her feelings by an unjust and unfounded accusation. It must be confessed that the lady had a powerful advocate in the heart of Ardent, which never suffered him to possess a moment's peace or tranquillity, while his mind harboured sentiments which were prejudicial to

his good opinion of her ; it is not, therefore, very surprising, that after attending to the arguments of such a pleader, Ardent was not very unwilling to listen to the still more plausible and specious ones which were uttered in the tender and bewitching tones of the lady herself ; in short, he suffered himself to be lulled for a time into a conviction of his own mistaken conclusions and her consequent innocence. While this harmonized state of feeling lasted, he was frequent in his visits to the house of his much-loved, and, as he fancied, much-injured mistress. Such attentions he conceived himself absolutely called upon to bestow, as a slight reparation to her wounded feelings.

But this tranquillity of mind lasted not long, and our hero was doomed to a repetition of his suspicions, in consequence of one or two trifling incidents which shortly after occurred. But, previous to our relating them, we must state a few remarks on the lady's uncle, and afterwards introduce him to our readers. This gentleman was very generally supposed to be a man of fortune and consideration ; his manner of visiting her indicated an extreme desire of privacy, always travelling unat-

tended, in a postchaise. Sometimes, during the meeting of Parliament in the spring, it was remarked that Mrs. Freelove took her departure for the metropolis, where she usually stayed about six weeks; but whether to participate in its diversions, or for the performance of more necessary avocations, was unknown. Ardent twice beheld this visible *incognito*; the first time was at the hour of breakfast, when he joined him and the lady in their repast, but the second interview was in a style not so congenial with the feelings of either; for, as Ardent was about visiting his charmer in his usual stealthy manner, by the circuitous route of the lawn which lay behind the house, he encountered, not his fair inamorata, but this very identical man from the moon, or some other place equally unknown to the uninitiated of the village. Both gentlemen started at the abruptness of the meeting, which was apparently as unwelcome to as unexpected by each; however, a cold and ceremonious bow passed between them, and Ardent, after stammering a confused apology, retreated. Mrs. Freelove felt vexed at this *mal-a-propos* meeting, but much more so at the want of address which Ardent

displayed in retreating, which gave his intended visit a clandestine or suspicious appearance ; and it required all her dexterity to clear herself from the construction which her uncle might put on the private entry and retrograde move of Ardent, which certainly was very much like that of a favoured lover, an idea she was particularly anxious that her uncle should by no means entertain. But as she was never wanting in ingenuity, she quickly framed a plausible excuse for herself, by affecting surprise at Ardent's retreat without having first had a conference with herself respecting some of her poor sick pensioners ; for she said he ought to have known that she particularly wished to see him respecting one of his poor patients, who was a *protégée* of hers. Then, by way of dispelling any doubts which might remain in the mind of her uncle, she informed him that this young medical gentleman was her almoner, or at least gave her intelligence of the necessities of the lower classes, and that she had found him to be a very useful agent in the disbursing of her charities. Now, as it is said that charity will cover a multitude of sins, so on this occasion it served to satisfy and chase away suspicion from the mind of the uncle.

But the mind of Ardent on this occasion was somewhat more irritable than the uncle's; the incident had tended to arouse all his former suspicions as to the actual degree of relationship which existed between this corporeal male apparition and the fair inhabitant of the lodge. He could not help frequently recalling to mind the idea which struck his imagination when he encountered the mysterious gentleman in the manner aforesaid, and which was, that he reminded him of a bashaw stalking about within the precincts of his harem, or the grand Turk himself at the palace of his favourite sultana. The frequent recurrence of this idea served to give it strength, till he almost convinced himself it was an English realization of his Turkish ideas. With such thoughts as these perpetually recurring to his imagination, it may easily be supposed that his lately assumed tranquillity speedily took its flight, and left him again a prey to tormenting doubt and disquietude, which he resolved the lady should share in, or, at least, the unhappiness and perturbation which arose from that cause. Accordingly, his accusations and expostulations became so frequent, that the lady, alarmed for the probable conse-

quences to herself, resolved to acquaint her uncle with her own version of the story the next time he visited her, and, by the apparent simplicity and ingenuousness of her complaint, prove to him her innocence respecting this impetuous and troublesome young man. The lady also foresaw that, if she came to an open rupture with Ardent, an event by no means impossible, the inhabitants of the village, who already viewed her conduct with an eye of suspicion, would not then fail to inquire more openly into the realities of her situation, which inquiry would eventually reach the ear of the Reverend Dr. Allworthy, of whose character she knew sufficient to be aware that he would quickly take the alarm for the safety of the young people he had entrusted to her careful patronage, and in all probability endeavour to rescue them from a lady of such dubious pretensions to the title of a watchful, vigilant, and prudent character, who would guard both herself and them from straying into the path of destruction. She considered that, if the reverend divine really should take it into his head to deprive her of the patronage of the Sunday school, it would be highly detrimental to her reputation, and that,

combined with the other reports in circulation, would ruin her with her uncle, if it came to his knowledge through any other channel than her own, as by her ingenuity of manner in representing, or rather misrepresenting, her troubles and persecutions, she could remove the blame from herself and attach it to Ardent and the reverend divine. To effect this without farther loss of time, she resolved on writing to her uncle, and in her letter to give him hints of the suspected sanity of the two gentlemen who, between them, divided the care of the bodies and souls of the inhabitants of the village and its neighbourhood. She insinuated that these gentlemen persecuted her without any other cause than a refusal on her part to answer all their impertinent questions; this accusation she knew was appealing to the most sensitive part of his feelings, as it was his most earnest desire to avoid the prying curiosity of the inquisitive.

Shortly after the despatch of this artful preparatory letter, this Uncle Somebody again mysteriously emerged from the interior of a postchaise, which had brought him from somewhere to the abode of his charming niece, and during the

period of his visit at her fairy bower, the conversation chanced to turn on the subject of the lady's precautionary communication, which conversation we will relate for the information of the reader.

“ From what you informed me, Elizabeth,” said the uncle, “ I fear two of your acquaintance are very strange characters. You must be very careful of forming too intimate an acquaintance with them ; if it is absolutely necessary that you should have occasional interviews with them for the purposes of religion or charity, let those interviews be as brief as the nature of your business will allow, and be careful in observing a certain dignified reserve of manner while in their presence, taking care to confine the conversation as much as possible to the subject of their mission, or else on very general topics. You say one is a physician, who has since taken orders in the church, and is now the officiating clergyman of the village. From what I have heard, he is a very respectable and pious gentleman: therefore you must be exceedingly observant and circumspect in your conduct, that this reverend person may not alter the good opinion he has so luckily formed of you. Truly, your having been

appointed as patroness to the Sunday school of the village, was a master-stroke of wisdom and discernment on the part of the reverend divine ; indeed, I scarcely know how to express my admiration of his profound sagacity and penetration. No doubt, the well-directed drafts from your purse materially assisted to aid the pious gentleman in his discrimination and selection, for charity is attended with a multitude of good things, not only to the receiver but the giver, as you have truly experienced on this occasion ; for high honour and distinction have been conferred upon you, not on account of your fortune and station in society, but as the most correct model of exemplary purity and excellence in the whole village and its surrounding district. So far you are particularly indebted to the charitably-judging mind of the reverend divine, who deemed you worthy to patronize and superintend the instruction of youth, from which so much benefit is expected to be produced by Parliament, that it has in its wisdom recommended the whole of the lower orders to be instructed in the ways of religion and moral virtues, under the immediate sanction and patronage of the church establish-

ment ; not so much, perhaps, from the advantage to be derived by the lower classes themselves, as to keep them from the tenets of Lancaster and the dissenters, who have upon this occasion acted as a stimulus to the higher orders ; and they, the upper classes, knowing that everything depends upon opinion in this country being imbibed in early life, rather than suffer the honour to be acquired by Lancaster and the Methodists, have very properly, I think, appointed the children of the poor to be instructed under the superintendence of the bishops of the diocese and their parochial clergy. For was not the system now pursued by church and state, of educating the poor in the knowledge of God and the duties of subjects, as explained by our clergy, belonging to the establishment, the poor, when they grew up, would unquestionably forget that there was either a church or state to be supported and respected ; and, as such principles would be highly injurious to the future prosperity of these realms as now constituted, Parliament in its wisdom has interposed, and foreseen the danger afar off ; and thus, by prudent generalship, frustrates that insidious undermining of its peace by timely pre-

venting the consequences, and by such means endeavouring to preserve their own privileges inviolable, which cannot be done without the aid and powerful co-operation of the lower orders of society, for without the labouring classes land is of no worth or utility; for, unless it is worked, manured, and cultivated, produce could not be obtained therefrom; the rich could not receive, neither would the poor consent to starve; and the danger of a peasantry growing up in principles directly opposed to the existing state of things, would be very great; and, as religion and early instruction are of the utmost importance to the rising and every subsequent generation, it is most wisely recommended by the legislature to inculcate early instruction throughout England, which example is expected to be followed by other states, to the general amelioration of the condition of the poor, and to the eventual benefit, no doubt, of the whole of the human race, for a general diffusion of knowledge is at length thought to be highly necessary, and, under proper regulations, all classes may be advantaged and none injured, which would not have been the

case had the first system been followed,—the dissenting or Lancasterian, for instance, to the exclusion of the church as established by law in these kingdoms. But I have been led to a farther discussion of the subject than I had intended, and will not fatigue you with a continuance of it; at the same time, I must observe, that I think the moral interest of the nation will be highly promoted, by having some of its children educated under your pious and virtuous auspices. The clergyman did well to place such an exemplary pattern of decorum and purity at the head of these young females, that they may model their conduct as nearly as possible from the life and manners of their spotless patroness.”

“ You may rely upon it, my dear sir, that I shall do all within my power and ability to promote and forward so good and useful an institution; and it shall not be my fault if these young females should turn out idle and useless in their generation. But I must confess that I have been much perplexed and disturbed of late by the conduct of Mr. Ardent, who, I believe I told you before, is the medical practitioner of the village.”

“Indeed! in what way does he annoy you? Tell me all the particulars of your disagreement, from beginning to end.”

“Really, my dear sir, you will smile when I tell you that this foolish young man, for I can give him no other appellation so appropriate, has taken it into his head to fall desperately in love with me, and earnestly wishes to marry me.”

“In love with you, and marry you! why, surely you must have given him some encouragement?”

“None whatever, my dear sir; but he conceives that my being a widow, and an unprotected female, it is impossible I can think of refusing his honourable offers of protection; and, to strengthen his argument, he says that matrimony is a sovereign remedy and preventive of melancholy ideas, and the notion seems to have entered his brain that he has a right to be my protector and guardian through life.”

During this speech the uncle looked grave, then bit his lip, and at length frowned, all of which portentous signs and omens were followed by a profound shake of the head, to which succeeded the ensuing caution:—“This is a very strange affair, indeed; I cannot satisfactorily

comprehend it, but let me seriously impress on your mind that you have a son, and that you have also my friendship to secure; and remember, the least step contrary to my wishes and injunctions will be your ruin, as well as the ruin of your son. So, beware how you encourage the addresses of this young man, or indeed of any other person whatever, for destruction would then await you. You well know that I have made considerable sacrifices to uphold you in your present respectable appearance in life, and while you observe my injunctions you may always consider me as your benefactor and best of friends, guardians, and uncles; then pause ere you risk my displeasure, which would be followed by a total desertion and neglect of you and yours."

The lady listened with awful attention to this terrible warning, and before this profoundly mysterious uncle had closed his harangue, his fair auditor had become a perfect Niobe, and in sobbing accents hastened to assert her innocence to this rigidly severe patron of her chastity.

"Believe me, my dear sir," she said, while the tears rapidly chased each other down her damask

cheek, “believe me when I say I have nothing to reproach myself with in my conduct to this young man, who is the plague of my existence, and who I believe will never be satisfied till he has put an end to it by his ceaseless persecutions. He makes a practice of listening to all the idle rumours and scandalous reports which the calumnious invent and circulate respecting me; then, on fire with his intelligence, he instantly repairs to me, and vehemently pours forth his accumulated collection of slander. At other times he will tease me on the mysterious silence I keep respecting the former part of my life, and strongly hint that, where there is mystery, it is because there is something to be concealed; in short, for what reason I know not, he fancies himself entitled to call me to an account for any part of my conduct which he chooses to disapprove of, although it is impossible to be more circumspect than I am. I heartily wish he had never seen me, for I believe it has turned his brain. What to do with him, or, indeed, how to act respecting him, I know not, and I often lament the absence of your prudent counsel and advice.”

“This is an unlucky affair, indeed, Elizabeth;

but remember that silence is your safeguard ; wave every impertinent question, if possible ; and if he obstinately persists in his troublesome importunity, then you have no other alternative than to treat him as an officious meddling fool : desire him to quit the house, and not molest you in future. Such treatment will be only a due reward for his impertinence. At the same time, avoid coming to an open rupture with him, if possible, as it will only tend to a farther inquiry into your affairs, which is by no means desirable. As to the reverend divine, I do not think you have much to apprehend from him, as he has already given a convincing proof that he is by no means inclined to cavil or disapprove of those who observe the outward duties of religion and charity ; therefore, be as regular in your attendance at church as heretofore, and give as largely to the poor as you possibly can, for charity, they say, availeth much in appeasing the wrath of the Almighty. But tell me, is there any suspicion in the village as to who I really am ? Does any one form a conjecture of my real name and character, or of my actual rank and station in society ?”

“ No, my dear sir, I believe your secret is still

safe ; the inquisitive and curious certainly form many conjectures, but they are all vague, and you are only known here as my uncle, my son's guardian, and the unknown gentleman."

"That is fortunate ; and as for your other vexations, they will gradually die away, if you strictly observe my injunctions : be calm, collected, and circumspect, and all will blow over, and beware that you do not, by your own imprudence, arouse any of those evils which prudent conduct may prevent ; above all things, let me give you this warning, and I hope it will not be too late to prevent mischief : if you, by any womanish folly or coquetry, fan the spark of attachment which Ardent already entertains for you into a flame, it may in the end consume, not only you, but all that belongs to you ; so attend to my instructions, and avoid this young man as much as possible ; for, from what I can learn, he is as much an enthusiast in his way as the reverend divine is in his."

The conversation was here interrupted by the entrance of the man servant, who informed the gentleman that his postchaise was waiting at the door. The gentleman nodded in token of having

heard the announcement, then waved his hand for the man to withdraw, after which, again addressing the lady, he said, " Write to me if any thing fresh occurs, but mind and observe the usual precautions in directing and forwarding your letter to me ; above all, be careful in keeping the secret of my name and consequence from the public, as you value the continuance of my protection to yourself and son ; but I will now bid you adieu, until I see you again, which I expect will be ere long,—so attend to my injunctions."

He then gave a parting kiss to his lovely niece, who quietly received this token of affection from the grave dignified uncle, and then meekly replied, " Depend on it, dear sir, I will observe all you say with implicit obedience and duty ; and I sincerely hope that, when you again come to see me, I shall not have so many vexations to complain of, which are not only a cause of uneasiness to yourself, but a source of actual distress and misery to me, for I very much fear that Ardent's love for me is too desperate to allow of my living a quiet, easy, and religious life, devoted in your absence to God and the amelioration of human suffering in the lower classes of society."

“ Say no more, Elizabeth ; say no more, but do as I tell you : observe punctually your church duties, and read the church service to your servants as often as you think is necessary.” So saying, he again bid the lady farewell, who attended him to his postchaise, which doubtless conveyed him to his place of destination ; but where that place was, was as much undiscovered by the inhabitants of the village as the North Pole is to the present day. But be that as it may, the departure of the gentleman uncle seemed to have no other effect on the spirits of the lady than that of exhilarating them ; for, as the sound of his chaise-wheels gradually died away, her countenance brightened till she seemed as if relieved from the presence of a supernatural visitant. She then returned into the house, humming to herself the air, “ Away with Melancholy.”

CHAPTER XI.

AT the close of the last chapter we remarked that the fair lady of the lodge did not suffer any remarkable depression of spirits, from the dread of solitude or ennui, after the departure of the grave and dignified member of the British senate, who was styled her uncle ; on the contrary, his absence seemed to be the signal for putting into execution a design she had lately formed, and which required some artifice and dexterity of management to accomplish. But we must first inform the reader, that some time before the uncle had arrived at the village, a young military man, who was on a visit at the house of his aunt, Mrs. Goodwill, which lady, it will be remembered, was the respectable friend and zealous advocate of Mrs. Freelove, who thought proper to repay the generous friendship of her venerable friend by bestowing her attentions on her nephew ; who, to make use of a common expression, had taken the lady's fancy, and that not from any previous

knowledge she had of him, but merely because he appeared to possess youth, health, good temper, and, above all, that quiet easy sort of principle and conscience which would not be so easily shocked as Ardent's, which would, consequently, make him a less prying and troublesome,—therefore, a much more desirable acquaintance to a lady of her easy and unscrupulous disposition.

But the difficulty was how to make her intentions and inclinations known to this young man, who had hitherto, with a careless indifference, declined the invitations she had sent him by her son; but Mrs. Freelove was a lady of that disposition whom obstacles or opposition only make more eager to obtain the desired object. She therefore industriously considered the means of accomplishing her intentions, till she had invented an expedient which she thought would succeed; and this was no other than to employ her lover, Ardent, to assist her in the affair, as he was in the habit of visiting the house of Mrs. Goodwill, and might, probably, succeed in prevailing on the young man to accept an invitation to dine at her house. To prevail on Ardent to undertake this extraordinary mission, seemed to be an arduous,

if not a hopeless undertaking—nay, more, to one of his sensitive and irritable disposition, might possibly even be attended with danger. She was aware that extreme caution, circumspection, and artifice was necessary, but, as she knew herself to be a perfect mistress of the latter quality, she resolved to make the attempt, and, as she believed she was now fully aware of the peculiar traits in Ardent's character, she did not despair of success. But she knew that, before she could hope to accomplish her plan, she must first reinstate herself in the good opinion of Ardent; therefore, she resolved on resuming her apparent penitence, which, aided by her well-acted sanctity, she doubted not would revive in one so credulous his former good opinion and tenderness.

To facilitate her plan, Christmas was just then approaching, a season when festivity and religion are generally combined. She lost no time, therefore, in luring Ardent again to her house, when she succeeded so well in convincing him of her innocence and sincerity that he wondered how he could ever have suspected her; she persuaded him that it was his own heart and mind that required calming, by the sacred offices of religion.

She then informed him that, by way of thoroughly repenting of the sins she had with him committed, and to strengthen her in her resolves of reformation, she should attend the holy communion on Christmas Day; and, as she felt concern for his soul, as he had been the erring partner of her derelictions, she requested he would, for the restoration of her own peace of mind, as well as the purification of his own soul, accompany her on that solemn occasion; after which she trusted his life would be as pure and spotless as her own would be in future. All this was said with such an apparent sincerity of heart and mind, that Ardent fell into the snare and promised to prepare himself to accompany her, and he already looked on her as a beautiful spirit, who would in future reside among mortals divested of all earthly frailties, and dividing her time in this world between her devotions to the Supreme Being and her efforts to ameliorate the condition and sufferings of the poor and unfortunate.

The day at length arrived when Ardent was to accompany what he fancied his future tutelary angel, to partake in those rites which he believed were to absolve her from all past, and secure her

from all future sin and frailty. With such ideas in his mind, he went through the ceremony with real sincerity of feelings, although not with the apparently excessive devotion of the lady, who, when it was ended, pressed Ardent to return and dine with her that day, that they might mutually strengthen their good resolutions and pious resolves, after the solemn ceremony they had together gone through. Ardent was in that frame of mind that he would have preferred solitude for the remainder of that day at least, yet the lady's request was apparently so reasonable, that to have refused it would have appeared like a doubt of either his or her own strength of mind and fortitude of resolution, which was an idea he would not have her entertain in the present instance on any account whatever. He therefore accepted, though with some inward reluctance, the lady's invitation to accompany her home. His scruples were also somewhat lightened on finding that her son was to be of the party. Accordingly, they repaired together to the lady's house, where all was conducted with order and decorum, combined only with such cheerful conversation as the festivity of the day would allow. But shortly after

the dessert was placed on the table, young Free-love left the house, perhaps in quest of gayer society, leaving the lady and her former lover, but now friend, together. Ardent fancied that she endeavoured to induce him to drink more freely than he had been accustomed to, and also thought he perceived a certain increase of levity in the manner of the lady, which he gravely tried to repress and check by gently reminding her of the serious and solemn ceremony they had that day gone through. His gravity was by no means pleasing to her, but she forebore to express her feelings, remembering that on his good opinion depended the success of her scheme in her affair with Captain Racket, which was the name of the young man whom she had resolved to catch in her net. She therefore placed a careful restraint on her inclinations, and changed the conversation to her son, who, she complainingly observed, was much at a loss for congenial society when visiting her,—that he had formed a wish to become acquainted with Captain Racket, which she by no means objected to, but, on the contrary, would highly approve, as she considered it would be keeping her son from lower and more disre-

putable society, which at present, she feared, had too much influence on his conduct and character ; and the eventual consequence of such influence would be a great cause of uneasiness and trouble to herself, but all of which, she thought, might be prevented by introducing him to better society, which would quickly tend to disgust him with his former low associates. “ Now, Ardent,” said the lady, in the most winning tone of voice, “ it is in your power to evince your friendly solicitude to my son in this affair, and, by so doing, to prove your real friendship to both mother and son, unmixed with any of the selfish passions that we have from this day discarded.”

“ Indeed, madam,” said Ardent, “ I should be very happy to promote the real welfare and interest of either yourself or son, or, indeed, both ; but I am not at present aware how I can be serviceable in this case.”

“ Then I will tell you, Ardent,” said the lady. “ By way of commencing this acquaintance, I should wish this gentleman to come and dine with my son and you at my house ; I should then have an opportunity of judging whether he was a proper acquaintance or not for him. Now you

know, from the very slight knowledge I have of him, it would not appear quite so decorous for me to give the invitation ; for I am now convinced, Ardent, that your observation was reasonable when you said I could not be too circumspect in my conduct, if I wished to avoid censure and be considered respectable, and I am determined to take your advice, by being in future so careful and circumspect as not to allow the most prying eye or censorious tongue to see or speak anything of me which even the goddess Vesta herself might not strictly approve. Therefore, in accordance with the strict resolves I have made for the future regulation of my conduct, it would not look so well that the invitation to this young man should come direct from myself. So I was thinking, Ardent, that as you are somewhat known to the aunt of Captain Racket, if you were to take my son with you, and introduce him to the gentleman as one who was desirous of his farther acquaintance, and then second my son's request that he would dine with him and yourself at my house, the invitation would doubtless be accepted, and my maternal wishes satisfied, without my name being exposed to the slightest breath of censure."

Ardent listened with mute attention to this artful request, and having mentally reviewed the subject with attentive consideration, he could not discover any motive for declining what appeared to him a reasonable application ; besides, his feelings were soothed by her avowed intentions of observing a strict propriety of conduct in future, and also by the apparent delicacy of her scruples in the present instance ; and, that he might not do anything to counteract such new-formed sentiments, he resolved to comply with her request. He accordingly informed her that he approved of the delicacy of her conduct in the affair, and, in obedience to her wishes, would accompany her son to Mrs. Goodwill's any day she might wish.

The lady's eyes sparkled with the success her scheme had hitherto met with, but she forebore to express her sentiments, and contented herself with thanking Ardent for his kindness to her fatherless and unthinking son. Ardent shortly after took his leave, pleased with the apparent change in the conduct of her who yet held a place in his esteem, and whom, in future, he hoped he should have cause to respect as earnestly as he had hitherto loved her.

Shortly after this apparent reconciliation, Ardent accompanied young Freelove to the house of Mrs. Goodwill, where he seconded the young man's request so effectually that Captain Racket accompanied young Freelove home to his mother's, for the purpose of dining with him and Ardent at the house of the fair lady—Ardent conceiving his presence necessary and wished for by the two lively young men. In this, however, he was deceived, therefore took an early leave; besides, he wished Mrs. Freelove to have an uninterrupted opportunity of watching this young man's conduct and manners when in the presence of her son, by way of judging whether or not she should consider him as a proper acquaintance for her son.

The absence of Ardent on this occasion was exactly what Mrs. Freelove desired, but from a very different motive to his; for it was by no means her purpose to scrutinize, with maternal caution, if Captain Racket was a proper companion for her son, but rather endeavour to make him a suitable associate for herself. She therefore cast aside the restrained and irksome behaviour she had assumed to please Ardent, as she was a downright female Proteus in her conduct

with the opposite sex, suiting her manner to the temper and disposition of her present company. On this occasion, discovering her visitor to possess a greater exuberance of animal spirits than intellectual refinement, she discarded the character of a religious devotee, which, having answered her intended purpose with Ardent, had now become troublesome to her, and in its place substituted what might be called the almost hoyden manners of a gay, lively, buxom widow, whose cheek had long ceased to blush at a loose *bon-mot* or an indecorous repartee. Between a lady of such an accommodating disposition and a young gentleman by no means overburdened with delicacy or fastidiousness, it may be supposed that the conversation after dinner was not very select ; for the fair hostess too much contemned any custom that interfered with her own inclinations to withdraw, for she was one who condemned “ all laws but those which love had made,” and gayly told Captain Racket that he ought to consider the presence of a lady gave a zest to the wine : to this the Captain gallantly assented, and the conversation became such as we will not offend the delicate ears of our fair countrywomen by repeat-

ing; suffice it to say, that it continued till a late hour, when the hospitality of the lady would not allow of her guest departing that night, but insisted on his accepting a bed in her best bed chamber; where, she informed him, he must content himself to be a prisoner for the night, for, as one of the doors communicated with the room in which she herself slept, she should lock him in,—that is, if she had not lost the key; but if she had been so unfortunate, she should then be compelled to place chairs or other obstacles against the door. The young man could not resist the hospitable invitation of the fair hostess, and, telling her that he submitted to be barricaded in the way she proposed, the party retired to rest, where we will leave them.

CHAPTER XII.

THREE weeks had elapsed since the introduction of Captain Racket at the house of Mrs. Freelove, during which time Ardent had heard rumours that astonished him, and he had consequently forborne to visit at the house of her whom he was now convinced was even more lost and depraved than ever he had suspected her to be. From what he had heard, he felt that he had been made her agent in an affair which was highly revolting to his feelings.

When he recalled to mind their late interview, in which she had not only declared to him her penitence and contrition for past faults, but her sincere resolves for an exemplary life in future, and which she had also thought proper to ratify at the altar of her God, he was astonished at her duplicity and wickedness; for it was evident that all this had been merely assumed for the purpose of deceiving him for a time into a good opinion of her, that she might the more easily

inveigle him to become her dupe or agent in her infamous designs on Captain Racket.

He was now in possession of actual facts relating to her character and conduct, which could no longer leave a doubt on his mind, and he debated with himself whether he was not called upon, in justice to the peace and welfare of others, to put a stop to her destructive and rapacious infamy by disclosing what he really knew of her character to some respectable inhabitant of the village: for it was now very evident that she was disposed to ensnare all the young men she could by any means become acquainted with, and for that purpose she contrived to make one subservient to her views upon another, and, by so doing, extend her mischievous principles and designs *ad infinitum*, proving her mind to be diseased either by insanity or no common depravity and wickedness. Indeed, Ardent now recalled to mind the suspicions of Mrs. Lovely, that her husband's affections had been seduced from her by this insatiable Circe. He again reviewed all the reasons he had for suspecting her since the very commencement of their acquaintance: in the first place, there were the ambiguous hints

of his friend Foresight, which subsequently arose to avowed suspicions of her real character and designs ; to these were added the various rumours and suspicions of the inhabitants of the village. He also remembered that she had contrived to rivet him in her fetters as securely as she possibly could, directly she became acquainted with the wishes of his family that he should unite himself to the lady who they conceived likely to promote his welfare, honour, and happiness : but all of which had been disappointed by the artful contrivances of this female Machiavel ; and through her seductive wiles his father and mother were doomed to mourn over his blighted prospects of domestic comfort and happiness.

His enthusiasm and attachment for her had been excessive while he believed her to be a really virtuous object, and even when, to his extreme surprise, she fell with him into an unfortunate error, he was inclined to make an allowance for that by attributing it to the almost unavoidable propensity to err in even the purest human hearts ; and which in her he considered as one dark spot amid a constellation of brilliant

and exalted virtues. While such were his sentiments respecting her, he considered her as one more sinned against than sinning, and therefore conceived himself bound to defend her character from what he considered to be false and undeserved aspersions. But now that her conduct had become so glaring as no longer to allow of his deceiving himself as to her real character, he considered it highly necessary to change his conduct respecting her, and, as he had no intention of becoming her pimp, or even appearing as such, it would be highly discreditable in him to countenance, even by his silence, such destructive machinations, which would be exposing others to the same unfortunate errors and illusions himself had suffered from; for he now conceived her to be such a consummate artist in her way, that she possessed the power as well as the inclination to entice to her secluded bower whomsoever she might choose to entangle. Such being his sentiments on the existing state of the affair, he judged it highly necessary to resolve upon some plan of proceeding, either by conferring with Mr. Foresight or the Reverend Doctor Allworthy, or, perhaps, both; for her

late conduct made it appear impossible that she could be longer considered worthy of retaining her station of patroness to the female department of the Sunday School, which place she had attained through the favourable opinion the reverend gentleman entertained of her character and principles; and to which good opinion Ardent, in the commencement of their acquaintance, had mainly contributed, by not only contradicting what he judged to be calumnies, but by eagerly relating and vouching for her religious and charitable actions; but as his want of discrimination and judgment had been the principal means of raising her to so respectable a station, he thought it was but just to atone, as far as he could, for such an error, by removing the veil of her mock sanctity and exposing the hideous vices which were concealed beneath. By so doing, he was aware that she must descend from that respectable height on which she was so unworthily placed, but he felt that, in justice to the welfare of others and the abused confidence of the Reverend Doctor Allworthy, he ought not to hesitate in bringing her down to the low station her conduct merited; for such a complicated species of

artifice as she had displayed in her conduct to himself, he had never before heard of or supposed possible; and he conceived he ought not to do otherwise than warn the inhabitants of the pest which was silently undermining the mental constitutions of several among them.

Ardent's mind had continued in this state of argumentative reasoning for three weeks, at the end of which time he had resolved on his course of proceeding; and in consequence of that resolve, he called at the house of his respectable friend, Foresight, by way of communicating to him her late unexampled conduct, and asking his advice respecting it. He found his friend in his study, amusing himself with his philosophical and scientific calculations and experiments, which, on seeing Ardent enter, he laid aside, and bade him welcome in his usual friendly manner, begging he would be seated, as it was some time since they had together chatted about and canvassed the news and chit-chat of the village. Ardent sat down, and, after some desultory conversation, the subject at length fell upon the lady of the lodge.

“Pray, Mr. Ardent,” said Foresight, “have

you seen anything lately of my young friend, Captain Racket? Upon my word, to judge by his seclusion, one might almost imagine he has exchanged the military for the monastic life, and that too on an improved plan, for, instead of immuring himself with a number of greasy, dronish, stupid, musty monks, he has preferred sharing the solitude of a fair nun ; and so piously and charitably does he devote himself to amuse her and join in her devotional exercises, that he has become completely invisible to his aunt and friends : it is now three weeks since he dedicated his services to the virgin, and the good old lady, his aunt, has become exceedingly impatient at such an uninterrupted and protracted observance of his vows. Indeed, she was not very willing, at the first, that he should enter into the lady's establishment or society, even on a short noviciate, as she was not quite certain that she should approve the doctrines or tenets which are there inculcated or acted upon ; and her only motive for not entering her actual protest against it, was in consequence of the pressing manner in which, she says, you recommended and even solicited his visit to the sainted son of the holy lady. I certainly was

surprised when I heard the respectable old lady make this assertion, and I consequently intended to ask you, the first time we met, what could be your motive in the affair,—whether it was for the good of the young captain's body or soul? Perhaps now you will have the kindness to gratify my curiosity, as I have hitherto suspended my opinion respecting your intentions until I heard them from yourself."

"I will satisfy your curiosity, my worthy friend, with the greatest pleasure," said Ardent, "and first beg leave to thank you for charitably suspending your opinion respecting my conduct in this affair till I could explain particulars, and to do which I will be as brief as possible while I give you a short history of the lady's artful manœuvres. You know her various arts of pleasing and persuasion; well, notwithstanding our repeated contentions and disputes, I was still inclined to think that her errors proceeded more from thoughtless good-nature than downright depravity of disposition, and she had the address to persuade me to accompany her to the sacrament on Christmas Day. I acquiesced in her pious request, for I had begun to conceive

that I had estimated her good qualities at much less than they really deserved, and we made resolves to be only friends and no longer lovers, as that sentiment had produced great unhappiness between us. Christmas Day, therefore, sanctified our vows, when she declaredly devoted herself to religion, and I to friendship, only. After the ceremony, at her earnest desire, I accompanied herself and son home to dine, as a token of amity and mutual friendship. I certainly accepted the invitation with some doubt of its propriety, conceiving it to be exposing ourselves to unnecessary temptation before time had assisted to confirm our good resolutions ; but after we had dined, her son absented himself, and she then pressed me to drink wine more abundantly than I was accustomed to do, but I was on my guard. Failing in that attempt, she then made a powerful attack on my new-made resolves, but, luckily, my better genius triumphed, and I withstood the dangerous temptation, but seriously remonstrated with her on the extreme impropriety of her conduct ; when she immediately altered her manner, congratulated me on the firmness of my reform, and energeti-

cally assured me that her only motive was to make a trial of my principles, by way of judging if I were really worthy of her future friendship and confidence, and she was sincerely happy to find that I was :—all this I credulously believed, and was satisfied. Before we parted, she conversed with me respecting the conduct of her son, and, lamenting the low society with which he mixed, besought me to rescue him from it by introducing him to the more respectable society of Captain Racket. I was too well satisfied with her apparent reform to deny her request. Her son, therefore, accompanied me on the following day, to introduce him to Captain Racket, and invite him to return with the young man ;—what cause I have to be satisfied with the success of my mission you well know, as the captain has not yet left her house, and I feel the odium of having introduced him there, although perfectly unsuspecting at the time of the consequence of so doing.”

“ Really, Ardent, I know not which to smile at most, the lady’s ingenious duplicity or your confiding credulity ; but how have you acted towards each other since ? Have you angrily

demanded an explanation, and she penitently and soothingly given one, or made you dispute the evidence of your own eyes and ears?"

"No, Mr. Foresight, I have not so completely forgotten what is due to my own honour and respectability as to demand an explanation, for it is utterly impossible that she can give one that would be at all satisfactory; besides, as I consider her conduct to be an open defiance of her late promises and engagement with me, I do not feel myself called on to observe half measures towards her, but make her sensible of her infamy and her insult to myself in a more open and decided manner, such as shall arouse real feelings of penitence and sorrow,—at least, if she has them at all in her disposition."

"Such are your present sentiments, Ardent; but I cannot help thinking that this will turn out as lovers' quarrels usually do—where the angry parties bury all past and present animosities in a kiss, and so go on again till a fresh dispute affords an excellent excuse for renewing the agreeable mode of adjusting it."

"No, Mr. Foresight, you will be mistaken in your prediction this time: my indignation is too

much excited by being made her fool—indeed, appearances would almost justify my saying her pimp or pander; but she shall find I am not to be made infamous, even in appearance, with impunity. I foresee it will fall to my lot to explode this mine of iniquity and magazine of mischief, and that ere long, or there will be no man safe either single or married;—I am not sure that even your morals, Mr. Foresight, are safe from the dire contagion, and, notwithstanding your calculating gravity, you may be out in your laws of gravitation, and fall when you least expect it. Then, again, there is the Reverend Dr. Allworthy, who, although he is clothed with the armour of religion, and bears about him the ægis of moral virtue, yet even they may not be absolutely invulnerable to the wily attacks of such an expert assailant.”

“I am sure the reverend divine and myself ought to feel infinitely indebted to your kind consideration, Mr. Ardent, but, for my own part, I do not apprehend the least danger. It is true the lady possesses great ingenuity, and appears desirous of excelling in various accomplishments; at present, she appears desirous

of acquiring military tactics—upon my word, she will in the end be a well-informed woman: then, again, her disinterestedness is truly admirable, for although she has, I believe, a multiplicity of lovers, I do not hear that she ever accepts any thing from them but the homage of love. She certainly must have experienced much rapturous felicity hitherto; but, if my observation holds good—and I have seldom known it fail, it will not be long before she meets with a proportionate reverse of fortune—the retributive scales of justice are now on the balance, and she will ere long be punished by Divine Providence for those defects in principle and deviations from his laws and commandments, which she has so flagrantly violated. It has been an axiom with me that happiness in this life is divided or allotted to all mankind—one individual has more felicity at one time and an equal proportion of distress at another, either in body or mind, or perhaps both; and this I conceive to be invariably the case from the throne to the cottage, or ought to be, which would be a proof of good government.”

“Your words, Mr. Foresight, are somewhat

prophetic of my intentions in this instance, which are to set about removing from this pernicious enchantress the opportunity of practising further mischief.”

“ First, Ardent, let me advise you to be quite sure as to the principles and motives that actuate you in this affair ; if you have any doubt as to her principles, yet hesitate and suspend the prosecution of your design, for when once a woman’s character is gone it is beyond the power of recall, and nothing can replace it.”

“ Your observation and advice, Mr. Foresight, are worthy of you ; but how can I entertain a doubt as to her principles any longer ? for it is too evident that Captain Racket is not under her roof as the companion of her son, but of herself ; for her son left the village the day after the captain’s first entrance to the house, and her uncle not being at the lodge, she has the whole of his society. I understand she has given him the key, that he may at any time cross the heath, and, unperceived, let himself in the back way, without exciting the attention of the village, and myself in particular—for of me she stands in some fear, not without reason. And now, my

dear sir, do you think there can be any longer a doubt on my mind of the principles of this woman? She has persuaded me against marriage—at least, with a proper object, and, gracious Heaven, for what? why, to become her gallant, her purveyor, her groom or lackey, her convenient tool, and, to sum up all, her unfortunate dupe.”

“ Upon my word, Mr. Ardent, such a multiplicity of stations or offices must have been exceedingly burdensome and oppressive,—I wonder how you have borne them so long without rebelling. You certainly have an unmerciful and unsparing mistress, and by the time you have felt a little more of her castigation, I think you may probably become somewhat desperate, and be in an excellent humour to retaliate a few of your smarts upon herself.”

“ I think, Mr. Foresight, that we have now come to a plain conclusion that the lady does not belie her name, and have demonstrative proof that her sanctity is a mere domino or disguise; indeed, her whole life is a masquerade. She has deceived and deluded hitherto, but the garment in which she has so long acted her part is worn nearly threadbare, so that even those

who have weak eyes and feeble understandings may discover the hideous vice under the flimsy garb."

"Well, Mr. Ardent, your sentiments and opinions are finely altered since we first conversed together on this subject—do you remember the arguments we frequently held?"

"Indeed, my dear sir, I do, and remember also the mortifications and disquiets I have voluntarily borne in contradiction to your better judgment. I have disappointed my friends and relations, and for whom?—I regret to say, a worthless jilt. Oh! I could chafe and storm in downright anger when I think on the many sleepless and agitated nights, when I have watched for the coming day that was to bless, or, as I have since too wofully discovered, curse me with her society."

"You have, indeed, my young friend, experienced some mixture of unhappiness with the more rapturous hours you have passed with this lady, but I fear you have more bitters yet to come."

"I hope not, my good sir, for I am sure that would be an undue preponderance to the sweets ;

which would set aside the doctrine you just now advanced of equal proportions of good and ill."

"Nay, Mr. Ardent, I am not inclined to alter my opinion ; but, as we are all apt to feel our misery more acutely than our felicity, you may probably think you have already experienced an equal division—but time will disclose whether you have or not."

"It will indeed, Mr. Foresight, and I sincerely hope it will relieve me of some of the intolerable anxieties under which I now suffer : but I will not trouble you farther with my grievances, this time at least, but let you know how I proceed in future with this mischievous syren—so, adieu, my good sir, for the present."

"Adieu, Ardent," said Mr. Foresight, "and, as I take an interest in the affair, be sure you report progress to me from time to time." Ardent promised he would, and took his leave.

CHAPTER XIII.

AND now, my fair countrywomen, I have arrived at the bathos of this history, or to that advanced stage of apparent respectability in our heroine, without her possessing a really estimable character to maintain it.

It is not the assumption of respectability without the reality that will insure a reputation of long standing : to succeed for a lengthened period in any particular branch of art, science, or even artifice, requires a consummate knowledge of human nature, as well as information upon such particular subjects on which fame or pretensions rest—whether in morals, physics, or any other given incident or peculiar circumstance for which the claim is demanded ; and should also possess such pretensions to originality or admitted excellence as will silence controversy and stand against the shock of criticism and minute investigation.

To be a woman of unbounded reputation for domestic virtues, including moral attributes, the

prudence of self-control is especially necessary, requiring strong powers of mind as well as discernment of character and discriminating abilities to protect the sacred edicts of the Almighty from violation, as contained in his ten commandments; to yield that justice due to every individual; and not presumptuously to assume that self-elected purity of character which the practical seductions of the world have deprived them of all right to.

The heroine of this narrative had, no doubt, good qualities, and such as would have made her estimable in private life, had she been suffered to continue in simplicity, unassailed by artifice and the blandishments of refined manners and polished life. But when she assumed the character of patroness to a public school, although in a village district, she became the more conspicuous for her elevation, and her fall we have to record with tenderness, if not with some commiseration.

In the last conversation between Ardent and Foresight, the former appeared to have come to a decision as to his mode of conduct, conceiving it to be impossible that he should ever again waver in his opinion of the absolute necessity of exploding this dangerous mine of mischief; but so un-

accountable and inexplicable is the mind of a fervent lover, that he would rather disbelieve his own eyes, ears,—nay, all his senses, than imagine for any length of time that the goddess his heated imagination had decked with every perfection of mind and body, should prove to be not only a mere mortal, but one of the most dangerous and disgusting description, almost approaching to the class of fiends. Such a lover was Ardent, and such was the irresolute state of his determination, that he had scarcely reached his own house after leaving that of his friend, than he began to relent, and, notwithstanding the outrageous provocation he had received, he still thought she might be deserving of kindness, and he accordingly felt loath to begin hostilities, lest he might repent his rashness. In this returning fit of tenderness, he recalled to mind her many apparent excellences; he reviewed in his mind all her imagined perfections, and dwelt upon each with all the enthusiasm and agony of disappointed love. He thought of her prayers, her fasts, and, above all, her almsgiving, although it was true they had somewhat lost their effect; he yet hesitated as to the humanity or necessity of thus sacrificing

her at the shrine of virtue ; he was willing to believe that she might labour under temporary derangement, and during that unhappy state, probably, committed those acts which her better reason would have shudderingly contemned, and which her returning sanity would undoubtedly cause her bitterly to repent of. If this fresh surmise of her sanity should be well grounded, he thought it would be the extreme of cruelty to bring final ruin upon her by farther exposing those unfortunate weaknesses which others might not have the charity or consideration to make due allowances for ; and even now, thought Ardent, may not this unfortunate yet interesting woman be making some atonement for her transgressions by bitter repentance and scalding tears ? But, alas ! gentle reader, for the verity of our hero's charitable conclusions of this repentant magdalen ; for scarcely had the idea taken possession of his mind, when, lo ! the lady and her gallant passed by his house, elevated in the triumphal vehicle of the former, the gallant and victorious Alexander guiding the reins of the Bucephalus, while the lady, like another Thais, “ sat blooming by his side.” This was quite enough for our poor hero,

and it effectually overturned all the tender arguments in her favour, on which he had been so fondly and compassionately ruminating; the sight threw him into a paroxysm of rage and agonizing jealousy; he actually chafed and raved with passion. “She braves me,” said he; “she evidently defies me to do my worst, but she shall learn, false, miserable, misguided, and infatuated woman as she is, that I will no longer be trifled with; she shall now learn to fear me, and tremble at the storm her own vile arts have raised. Yes, yes, she shall now be convinced that her systematic wickedness has at length arrived at its termination; for systematic I am now fully assured it is, and she has bent the whole force of her mind towards gaining that seductive influence over the opposite sex which, like a female Lovelace, she glories in. Alas! how unfortunate is my fate, that I should have settled my affections so unworthily as to be compelled by every feeling of honour to sacrifice them rather than allow my honour to be sacrificed to them. Mine was no common love, nor of that sickly, sentimental, namby-pamby description, which consists in delicate flattery; but of such a fervent and energetic

description as occupied the entire heart and soul, and forced out all other ideas that related not to the idol to which every feeling of body and mind was devoted. Unfortunate that I am to find, ere the moon has revolved round its monthly course, that the being I had fancied and worshipped as a divinity, should prove to be a fiend or demon of the most malignant and destructive character ; but let me pause and consider if the sentiment with which she inspired me was really love,—was it of that tender, yet exalted description, that makes the lover regard his mistress with a degree of reverential awe and respect, and feel tremblingly alive lest the slightest deviation in his words or actions should wound that chastity of feeling and delicate propriety of conduct which constitutes woman's brightest adornment. Ah, no ! my love was not of that exquisite nature, for she on whom I doated was incapable of inspiring so worthy a passion ; on the contrary, my love was a whirlwind, a tornado, a fierce hurricane of the passions, which swept away all the mild and amiable feelings of the reasoning faculties, and substituted in their place the more fierce and brute-like sensations, such as rule the minds of those animals

who are guided by the strong impulse of instinct; in fact, it was a ferocious tumult of inconceivable distress of mind, madness, or infatuation. Such love inevitably brings degradation or vengeance in its train, and revenged I will be, in proportion to the injury I have received, which her own conscience will tell her is of no slight nature. I will also avenge the mischief she has heaped on neglected wives and forsaken maidens by her destructive and seductive arts, and by so doing I shall effectually deprive her of the power of committing farther evil, at least within some distance of this neighbourhood. Yes : this Urganda shall find in me a Merlin, who both can and will render her magic wand of no effect. And now let me arrange my plans to bring down this towering piece of mischief to a proper level : let me divest her of her smiling glittering garb, and expose the foul deformity which lurks beneath. But let me pause, ere vindictive feelings may arise to such a degree as to outrage humanity, which towards one of the softer sex, however she may have erred, would be unpardonable ; for, after all, is she not an object of pity ? and ought I not rather to commiserate her lot in having so large a por-

tion of the errors and frailties of human nature fall to her share? added to all this, am I sufficiently disinterested and impartial to be her judge as well as accuser? Let me reason with myself, lest jealousy and disappointment should goad me to an infuriated and vindictive system of persecution rather than a retributive justice and a precaution against future mischief to others from her snares ; such precaution I consider myself bound to take, but it must be done as mercifully, yet decidedly, as possible ; it is true she has injured me, and that deeply, but let me not by extreme severity utterly annihilate her, without affording her a chance of reforming. My own conscience must not have cause to reproach me with any malice in my conduct towards her ; and by giving her every opportunity of becoming a reclaimed woman, my justification will be complete, while humanity, that most commendable feeling of our nature, will be strictly observed. It is very likely she may endeavour to involve me in her revenge for my making her conduct known, and such is the inconsistency of human nature, that rather than try to save herself, which she may yet do, I should not be surprised if she was to

abandon the chance of so doing and endeavour to drag me down the precipice of destruction with her own reckless self. But while I act justly I do not fear that any material evil can arise,—indeed, why should I? Is not my cause also the cause of every honest and virtuous mind? will not the worthy class of mankind perceive and acknowledge the necessity of the part I am acting, and accordingly support and encourage me with their approbation? for now even the wise cannot perceive the extent of her art, as the semblance she sometimes bears to virtue and piety would deceive older and more sapient heads than mine, and, perhaps, embitter their peace in the way she has my own—embittered, do I say? Alas! I ought to say destroyed, for has she not cast a black and heavy cloud over the morning of my days, which will, in all probability, shed its murky gloom on the noon—nay, perhaps, declining eve of my life. And shall this malign influence continue to be shed over other victims, till she has turned this hitherto peaceful village into a vale of horror and despair?—By Heaven! the very thought arouses me almost to a pitch of fury and distraction. But I will prove that I have not suf-

ferred for nothing—no, no, my wrecked and shattered feelings shall be a powerful beacon to warn others from the treacherous coast on which my peace and happiness were wrecked: nay, I will do more,—I will even turn the tide of this destructive engulfing whirlpool, that it shall no longer flow to the destruction of others. Yes, the reign of this devouring Scylla is nearly at an end, and she herself may perchance be overwhelmed in the vortex down which she has hurled so many victims. Good God! that so lovely a form as this woman possesses should cover so foul a heart; but it is this fatal beauty, accompanied by her insidious yet winning smiles and blandishments, which makes her the more dangerous by ensnaring poor fascinated fools, who, like silly moths, are attracted towards the brilliant flame which too surely proves their destruction. Perchance, some of her infatuated victims will be indignant with me for destroying the illusions which this fascinating sorceress throws around her, and even I may, perhaps, weep over the beautiful wreck when she is bowed low by the retributive justice which my duty compels me to heap on her devoted head, by way of stay-

ing her wilful career of crime and error, and as a prevention of any repetition of her mischievous power and influence. But I will not trust entirely to my own feelings on this occasion, as I am not, perhaps, sufficiently disinterested to be impartial in the affair. I will, therefore, unburden my mind to my pious and worthy friend, the Reverend Dr. Allworthy—I will ask his advice as to the proper mode of conduct to be pursued toward this wilfully unhappy woman. The worthy doctor possesses a large portion of Christian charity for the errors and failings of others, and, although he will doubtless be surprised and grieved at the information which I shall give him, yet his benevolent disposition will, in all probability, point out to me the mildest and most charitable mode of proceeding, although I am convinced that his zealous and fervent piety will not suffer him to allow such baneful influence longer to reign triumphant in his district.

To him, then, I will appeal in this hour of trouble, for by his admonitions he will strengthen those virtuous principles which I imbibed in early life, and also favour me with that counsel most essential to my present and future welfare ; he

will, besides, in all probability, assist me in removing this evil from the village, where it has grown to such a prodigious enormity as to be no longer controlled by sage axioms, sober advice, or admonitory counsel ; and, while my reverend friend is labouring hard to bring souls to God, as he calls it, my irreverend friend is leading souls to the devil, or, by placing them in tribulation, she is depriving them of those virtues which should be made use of to the advantage of themselves and others. Thank Heaven, my resolution is now fixed, and, that it may not again be shaken by any returning weakness, I will repair at once to my reverend friend, and make to him the too long delayed confession ; at the same time I will not disguise from him that I have been her complete tool, the slave of her vicious propensities, which will account for my not making her known at an earlier period. The worthy divine will no doubt tell me that I ought to be thankful for the last proof of ignominy which she conferred on me, as it aroused me to break from the vicious and sinful chains by which I was bound, and enabled me to return to virtuous liberty—and in so saying I believe the worthy divine would not err.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE Reverend Doctor Allworthy may have been about forty-five years of age when he relinquished his professional practice as a physician in London and in a London hospital, to become a curate in a country village, within the precincts of Windsor Forest. Whatever was the amount of his stipend, he is supposed freely to have given it to the poor, and, as we before remarked, built up their cottages, chimneys, or roofs, when blown down by the wind or impaired by other accidents, and humanely attended to their various distresses of body and mind. Such benevolent conduct caused him to be justly considered as the true pastor of his flock of village sheep and lambs.

With the intention so often expressed in the light figurative reasoning of Scripture language, denoting the zealous and anxious care of the pastor over his congregation, or those souls committed to his charge, our worthy clergyman came to reside among the parishioners of this hitherto

quiet village, unnoticed except in the diary of the traveller, or as a post of rest to the weary stager, or still more tired post-horse, after traversing the heath or wild parts of the forest. His character, conduct, and zeal for the saving of souls was proverbial; indeed, so extraordinary was his address in appealing to the consciences of men and women, that not even Whitfield or John Wesley surpassed him in a religious zeal for converting the hardened sinner and making him or her place a reliance upon God Almighty for protection and salvation. Such a man was considered by many to be a complete treasure in the village,—indeed, a kind of saint or apostle. He pointed out to his parishioners how they might all be satisfied in this world, and also secure immortal happiness in the next, and that was by catching hold of a small portion of the garment of Jesus Christ; in other words, the worthy divine meant to infer, that if his audience attended to the divine precepts and commands of that exemplary being, it would be to the welfare of their souls in this world, and the next also, which would be witnessed by all the host of angels and arch-angels, where they would for ever hear hallelujahs and

hosannahs to the Most High surrounding the throne of God. Some, indeed, have gone so far as to say, he was an enthusiast, meaning he was an evangelical preacher in the true sense of the word, while others again did not scruple to call him a downright madman; but this last ungracious appellation was not applied to him, as the author could learn, until many years afterwards, when it was said more with the view, perhaps, to countenance the venial sins of some great man or men, as they are denominated by the licentious few, not proverbial for the observance of the whole of the Ten Commandments, as, “Thou shalt not commit adultery,” &c.

That Mrs. Freelove was at times influenced by the divine inspirations or frenzies of the mind, can scarcely be doubted; but thinking that, with all her zeal, the promised bliss of Paradise might yet be long delayed, and being withal a lady of a somewhat impatient disposition, she thought it would be more to her own satisfaction if she occasionally took a little solace or amusement according to her own inclinations, although that amusement was rather more of a corporeal than spiritual nature; but, whatever it was, she

thought it would make the passage through this world of trial and tribulation a little more agreeable, for all the bitters of this life, without some of its sweets, were not exactly suitable to a lady of her constitution and habits; and as Doctor Allworthy prescribed for the mind, she ventured of her own free will to seek a remedy for her corporeal infirmities. Things were in this state when Ardent repaired to the residence of the worthy Mrs. Goodwill, a part of whose house was occupied by the Reverend Dr. Allworthy. This lady was the widow of the former rector, and although advanced in years, she possessed much vivacity of manner and disposition, for having been left by her late husband with a competent provision, sufficient for all the requisite comforts of life, she felt herself perfectly happy in the reflection that she could wait with patience and resignation for the world to come.

Ardent found the reverend divine comfortably seated in a large old-fashioned room, situated on the ground-floor, at the back of the house, the windows of which looked out on a neat lawn and flower-garden. He was surrounded by his books of learning, biblical and evangelical, or, in other

words, the truths of the Gospel, with the commentaries of the learned in disputed points of doctrine, both orthodox and heterodox, with all the paraphernalia and implements of sermon-making, as well as compositions already prepared, on the efficacy of prayer and the duties of a Christian and well-spent life; stating that, however painful repentance might be to the sinner, yet, nevertheless, it was the only way to secure the promised rewards hereafter, which were incalculably preferable to the delusive and deceitful joys of this sublunary world. In this pious fervour of the soul was our most worthy and reverend divine, Dr. Allworthy, found by Ardent, composing his sermons for the following Sunday; and the surprise created by the interruption of worldly affairs while preparing his homilies, may be better conceived than imagined; but such as it was, it is hoped the reader can give credence to, and will be described in the subsequent colloquial discourse. But, previous to which, we will detain the reader to make some digression. Mrs. Goodwill, the widow of the late rector, kept up what is termed a good table, and was famed for her hospitality, as our hero had more

than once participated in, proving the old English custom not to have been quite abolished in this, what would appear to some minds, inhospitable region. Be this as it may, our kind and good Reverend Dr. Allworthy is supposed to have at least occasionally enjoyed himself in a temperate supply of the creature comforts, and I scarce ever knew one individual, whether gentle or simple, who was the worse for his or her attention to the creature, if at the same time due observance was paid also to the Creator.

It is not the business of the author in this work to portray completely perfect characters, for none, properly speaking, can be called perfect; but those which approached nearest to perfection within observation are here illustrated, and the Reverend Dr. Allworthy was one of the most amiable of human beings, and truly pious; Mrs. Goodwill, his elderly friend and landlady, the same; but the author is sorry that truth compels him to relate that the nephew of Mrs. Goodwill (the captain we have before alluded to) was neither better, although not perhaps worse, for the pious exhortations of so worthy a divine as the Reverend Dr. Allworthy (for under the

same roof they both resided), or for the cautious, prudent, and exemplary conduct of his aged, hospitable, and most worthy aunt, who was not only respectable in herself, but deservedly respected by all who had the happiness of her acquaintance.

The back parlour of this worthy widow Lady was, as before remarked, of spacious dimensions, containing three large windows, one of which opened on the lawn or green sward, surrounded as it was by parterres of flowers. The furniture of this apartment was old, but good of its kind, and, as near as our hero could judge, appeared as if a century had past away since it came from the upholsterers, but was of really good, old, solid mahogany, and each chair, as compared to those of modern formation, might have been styled a chair of state worthy of accommodating the most dignified patriarchal rectors of former days who may have occupied the mansion.

The chairs as well as tables, with few exceptions, were piled with books, many of them open, as oracles of silent and monitory reference upon doubtful points of controversy, or interpolation of words, sentiments, and ideas, concerning the god-head, and all the mystical and typified interpreta-

tions of polemic divinity. In the midst of this combustion of scholastic learning and profound orthodoxy, sat the sagacious casuist, or in other words, the highly respectable physician metamorphosed into a reverend divine of the Church of England, who lashed the vices of the age, and feared not, and thundered from the pulpit the canons of the church with all the fervour of the most religious zeal, consisting of the artillery of scripture, indicative of the wrath of heaven to a fallen race, who obeyed not the will of the Most High, nor conformed themselves within the precepts of his commandments.

In this critical period of time, appeared our hero before the defender of God's throne, as the sentinel on duty at his post, or guarding with all the energy of his mind the gates of paradise from being either invaded or profaned ; but, lest the author may be accused of levity or irreligion, he will desist from further description of the feelings that possessed Ardent as he approached the confessional chair of this truly pious man, who pictured to his imagination the appearance of an evangelist of former times exemplified at the present day ; indeed, he was the most like one

he had ever beheld. Our hero, in the enthusiasm of resentment, and perhaps not a little irritated by having deprived himself voluntarily of the gratification of beholding the fair enslaver of his affections, and once idol of his fondest hope and most enthusiastic joy, and withal never being possessed of the coolest imagination and most reflective powers of mind, so indicative of the sage, and the soundest philosophy of reason and common sense ; impelled too as he now was by the ardour of his zeal, and, as he had imagined, patriotism in the cause of religion, honour, and virtue—he approached his friend, the worthy divine and most able counsellor he could have appealed to upon such an emergency of distracted feelings, perversity of sentiments, and he knew not what other hosts, ills, or how numerous were the evils that had assailed him, or were about to assail him. Had the anger of Ardent been less violent, or his sense of injustice to the cause of religion and moral virtue been less sagacious, he would have done as others would in the like circumstances,—probably have had an interview with her as usual, and she would have persuaded him his imaginative opinions had ex-

ceeded the boundaries of his real judgment ; no unusual circumstance when the solid dictates of reason are blinded by the fervour of the passion of love. Of such a character was Ardent's infatuation : it might be said to resemble a violent tempest of the passions let loose, no longer within the soothing control of the amatory deities, but of those fiends called angry impulses, which subjugate the mind of even well-informed individuals, when not restrained by the command of reason and the dictates of sober sense. Alas, reader ! our hero's frailties are as much to be lamented as that the lady of his affections should transgress the delicacy of her sex and the decency due to good manners and decorum, in entertaining a young bachelor in her house for three weeks, without any ostensible or professional pursuit whatever, that could be discerned or conjectured by his well-meaning friends and, heretofore, zealous admirers ; by which conduct he is supposed to have tarnished the laurels he had won on field-day reviews, and other fatiguing duties, both of marching and countermarching, from country quarters to country towns, and back again, so peculiarly characteristic of the bravery,

fortitude, and perseverance of the British soldiers, when under martial orders to hold themselves in readiness, at a moment's notice, to execute the will and decree of the major-generals, or generals of the staff. Had Ardent, as before remarked, called upon the lady previous to his communication with the Reverend Dr. Allworthy, the information he had to give, in all probability, would never have transpired beyond the propriety due to the softer sex, but have murmured in her ears an accusation or reproach; and, as heretofore, would, perhaps, have been forgiven the infidelity to her vows, upon a promise of future amendment. But such was not to be the termination of this awful affair: it was a dereliction from the principle of true love, at least such as it had been associated in our hero's mind from his earliest recollections; for true lovers' knots, and truth of the heart, a uniformity of sentiment and opinion, etcetera, had somehow or other always associated themselves in his mind as inseparable; and now, for the first time, he was convinced, by a too sad experience, indeed, that some ladies of an undefined character had more hearts than one to yield, and freely bestowed their favours (in our

hero's opinion, at least) in a very inconsiderate manner, as if totally regardless of the after-consequences, which it is the business of the historian of these transactions to record. But as various readers will entertain different sentiments, they are now to be informed of those incidents which had an influence over the future life of Ardent, which will prove, beyond the possibility of doubt, that the neglect of parental counsel was the source of the greatest troubles and misfortunes that could happen to Ardent; and all his future prudence and after-reflections could not arrest the will of fate or the decrees of Divine Providence. But, as this chapter has already arrived at the usual length of chapters in general in this history, the important conference that passed between the worthy divine and his parishioner will be related in some of the following pages, showing the piety, fervour, virtue, and holy zeal of a good man; and the folly, indiscretion, and lost state of our hero, who may have been truly considered as infatuated in no ordinary degree.

CHAPTER XV.

ARDENT, as before intimated in the last chapter, had introduced himself to the Reverend Dr. Allworthy for the purpose of disburdening his mind and conscience, but he approached the reverend gentleman with rather a cautious and timid step, as if dubious of the propriety of his conduct, and whether it would not be better even to recede with an apology for the intrusion, than disclose what he had to communicate. But he recollected the reverend divine had often proved his friend, so that the intelligence and doubt that harassed his mind, might make it more natural that he should endeavour to ease that troubled state of feeling by availing himself of the good man's counsel, whom he perfectly knew to be sound in judgment as well as matured by experience. He wished to consult him upon the present occasion, more as a friend than as a divine, that it might be left to his better judgment to direct what should be done and what avoided.

It must be confessed an arduous and painful state of feeling on both sides—the one in sacrificing a lady whom he had heretofore looked upon as his dearest friend; and the other, in giving counsel upon so delicate a disclosure of the principles of a woman for whom he had entertained the highest respect, conceiving her to have approached the nearest to every virtue and perfection, of both mind and person, that could adorn the sex, and consequently every way worthy of becoming the patroness of his darling Sunday School. The manner in which the communication was made was, perhaps, as judicious as the nature of the circumstances would admit, impelled as he was by angry feelings, wounded pride, and mortified sensibilities; for Ardent was not hacknied in vice and profligacy, but had become accidentally the pander to another's voluptuousness. The result was as might naturally be expected from so religious and devout a character as the Reverend Dr. Allworthy, who, as it now appeared, trembled even for himself; for, as he was a widower with only one son, it is not impossible but he might have entertained the idea of making her an offer of his hand, and only waited

to be further convinced of her eligibility to so dignified a proposal, and may have delayed the proposition until, by further confirmation, he was assured of the propriety of her conduct in moral and religious exercises of the heart and mind. If such was the fact, the disclosure of Ardent came very seasonable to the worthy Dr. Allworthy, and prepared him, by a previous knowledge of that pitfall of destruction, strewed over as it was with flowers, which had blindly led Ardent to his own wretchedness. It was a serious feeling that induced our hero now to disclose the precipice which lay in the path of all young men,—nay, even married men were not exempt from the contagion of the pestilential influence of the syren and the saint, who lured by the melody of her voice, and entangled within the meshes of her net, those whom she wished to secure as votaries to her licentious orgies or midnight revels. But, lest declamation may give but an imperfect representation of these two worthies, the Reverend Dr. Allworthy and our hero, their colloquial discourse is now introduced, for the information of the reader.

Ardent, after some preliminary apology for his

intrusion, thus commenced the displeasing office of apprising the worthy Dr. Allworthy of his mission:—"It is with pain and regret I come to advise with you, reverend sir, in an affair of considerable consequence to the well-being of society in this village—not as relates to this parish in particular, but to an extensive circle of mankind, who may be injured in their domestic peace; for whole families may be ruined by a continuation of the mischief which is carrying on within your immediate neighbourhood, and within the circle of your parochial duties."

"You alarm me, sir; do I hear you right? Recapitulate the heads of what you have been saying,—a monster resides in my neighbourhood, and under my immediate charge in my capacity of pastor to my flock?"

"It is true, reverend sir, and it is with reluctance I communicate my intelligence."

"Be plain, sir, be serious, and do not trifle with my feelings—with my apprehensions: as a shepherd, I am obliged to overlook my fold, and if a disordered sheep is within my pen, it must be removed."

"Hear my history, sir, then judge for your-

self, as I wish you not to force constructions which the circumstances will not warrant. A woman, or rather an artificial lady, has been the disturber of my peace, and she may be so to the peace of others; need I say more of the person to apprise you whom I allude to?"

"I think I apprehend you, yet let me pause—it may be so. But then there must be the most consummate art concealed beneath the simplicity of a babe. How can you prove this?"

"I will confine myself to facts, reverend sir, and even suppress a part of their import, that I may not exceed the bounds of truth."

Ardent then related the particulars of his grievance, which the reverend gentleman heard with pious horror and astonishment.

"You mean Mrs. Freelove, the patroness of my school—a wolf among young lambs. I thank you; from the very bottom of my heart, I thank you. Such immorality, and myself countenancing the same, within my own parish! I cannot serve God and Mammon! Give me the benefit of your experience, sir, that I may judge of the propriety of rooting out this Jezebel from among our

dwellings. Why, neither of us are safe. I am but flesh and blood, like other men."

"I give you my word, sir," said Ardent, "I have been racked and tortured by all kinds of ingenuity; her artifice is unbounded, and I came to apprise you of the same, that there may be less chance in future of victims falling into the snare of temptation. Her piety is assumed—her virtue of chastity is the same—she possesses all the dark shades of a female character, which she endeavours to conceal under the appearance of the milder virtues, rendering her deceitfulness successful, and combining also a semblance of candour and ingenuousness. Her retirement is not for the purpose of avoiding a sinful world, but for the purpose of intrigue. The bowers of seclusion are the bowers of enchantment, and the uncle of whom we have all heard so much, I suspect to be her principal keeper, although he may be the only one."

"So, then, this pious, this virtuous woman, is no other than sin itself, and myself had nearly fallen into her snares. May God, in his infinite mercy and goodness, grant me strength to with-

stand all temptations, as a spiritual disciple of our Lord Jesus Christ." So saying, the divine went on his knees in one of the large chairs before mentioned, with his face to the wainscot, and his back to the windows, his hands clasped together and his eyes uplifted towards heaven, praying most fervently and devoutly; Ardent remaining a silent spectator of the beauty of holiness and the effect his communication had upon the nervous and mental sensibility of this good man, who, recovering his standing position, addressed Ardent in the following manner:—

"Kneel before God," at the same time pointing to a chair; Ardent complied, and the Reverend Dr. Allworthy knelt also a second time, on another chair, by the side of Ardent. "Pray with me," said the worthy pastor, "and return thanks to God Almighty for your escape from the paths of the wicked, and for being plucked as a brand from the burning."

Ardent, although kneeling, could not pray, and replied,—

"Upon my word, reverend sir, although I can kneel, and have an inward sense of my misfor-

tunes, yet I cannot pray at present, I am so confounded and astonished at all circumstances.”

“ Then I will pray for you,” rejoined the worthy clergyman, and both still continued kneeling in the same position for at least ten minutes ; and then, recovering their standing positions,—“ Now, sir,” said the Reverend Dr. Allworthy, “ I will inform you of my mind. She must be rooted out of the parish, from my flock. She is the wolf in the fold—a lioness among lambs. You, sir, must help to rout the Jezebel ; she must be made known—Satan is busy in the world, seducing the innocent and unsuspecting. She is the more dangerous, as all those imperfections in her character are accompanied by a pretty face, which lureth to destruction.” Her artfulness is of the most consummate kind, and, withal, wearing the holy garb of religion. O, that I should have walked from church with her one afternoon, giving her religious counsel, all the way to her own house, where Satan holds his principal court for the destruction of my flock and its shepherd. I see the snare was laid ; the trap was hid from my view by her apparent sanctity

and humility. She asked me to explain religious portions of Scripture which had puzzled and embarrassed her judgment. Some parts of the Scripture she interpreted incorrectly; then would call upon me to request that I would lend her my manuscript copies of sermons upon the Lord's Prayer, which I had been expounding of late."

"She borrowed them for me, Dr. Allworthy, and I copied them for her, thinking better of her at that time than I have reason to do at the present."

"So, sir, you made a stumbling-block of religion, and made religion itself subordinate to vice. Oh! that nature should have been so bountiful to her, and she make so ill a use of the Almighty's choicest gifts,—to the seducing of souls from God.

Her piety is as filthy rags,—
A composition of corruption.

Better place a tiger among my lambs, than a syren that lures, by the sweetness of her voice, to perdition, where there is weeping, and wailing, and gnashing of teeth. If God gives me strength to remove this great evil, I shall not have lived a useless shepherd among the fold, and all will tend

to glorify thy name (looking devoutly upwards), where there are Hallelujahs and Hosannahs to the Most High. Well, sir, the only counsel that remains for me to give you, is to avoid the lioness ; her paths lead to destruction in this world and in the next. You have been wrong, sir, in not following the counsel of your father's better judgment. With a respectable young woman for your wife, with a fortune, you would have been happy ; as it is, you are not only now miserable, but it is impossible for you to conceive the inconveniences that may befall you. You are now in the early part of your manhood, and may reform, and may God in his infinite mercy shower down on you his blessings. May you never repent this day's communication to myself. She is now in my hands ; I will remove her from the parish, for she is the more dangerous as her simplicity seems natural, and her artifice is unequalled. She is a Messalina indeed, any thing but a good woman. I now leave you, to pray that you may see the errors of your conduct as plain as I can perceive them. But you have been seduced, and we are all of us in danger unless she is speedily removed. But I dare not stay longer conversing upon this subject. Farewell !”

The worthy divine having made this peroration, retired, leaving our hero, Ardent, confounded, amazed, astonished, perplexed, bewildered, torn, and assailed by duty one way, and on the other, an inclination to save the wretched woman by all the ingenuity he could devise, that she might not become wholly a profligate character, but reform.

CHAPTER XVI.

ARDENT, on his return to his own house, after the important conference he had so recently held with the Reverend Dr. Allworthy in the house of Mrs. Goodwill, was agitated with conflicting passions of too agonizing a nature to be described in a particular manner ; but such may in part be conceived by the following epitome of the state of his feelings—a sensible, or, rather, a sensitive mind, torn with all the tortures of the most afflicting disquietudes, day and night agitated with the pangs of jealousy, or a struggle with himself between his remaining good and evil propensities ; sometimes fancying her an angel, again accusing her as the fiend of his peace and well-doing, blasting his hopes and destroying his prospects in this world, if not in the next. The woman he had fancied an angel in his creative imagination proved to be too bad to name ; he shuddered at the thought of her imperfections, and yet dared not commiserate her, lest by

softening his own mind, he should relax his principles, and the communications he had made to the Reverend Dr. Allworthy should be rendered impotent. “ Oh ! could I reclaim her,” said Ardent, in an agony not to be described, “ could I but reform this pleasingly beautiful, but wicked woman—could she be brought to a sense of her improprieties, and practise in future a correct life, I could worship her as a divinity ; and would try to forget her imperfections, and fancy my senses, my judgment, my suspicions,—nay, even convictions, to have been all deceived ; I would do anything to be at peace with myself and think well of her, for to think ill of her is to be miserable. It is true she asked me lately if I would marry her, but that is out of the question, for she is a woman whose pretensions to sanctity, virtue, and religion, are no longer doubtful, and Dr. Allworthy thinks the worst of her imaginable. He has the apprehension of her either having or wishing to have an influence over him, and, therefore, he resorts to prayer, and, perhaps, to fasting, while I, from my heated imagination, can do neither. Reason says, the woman is unworthy of your further consideration—the Reverend Dr.

Allworthy says the same ; she is moreover an artful character. It would have been far preferable to have followed your father's advice—you would have been free from anxiety, and at this time probably in a state of tranquillity, if not perfectly happy. The mock heroics of the serio character have their turn in my overcharged mind ; they accuse me of unlawful love, urging that it will be my ruin, and seem to imply, if not directly accuse me, of being an infatuated character. Others again, in the more formidable array of the tragic muse, represent to my creative fancy that I have sacrificed the woman of my affections, the lady I once loved. ‘ You have done all you could do,’ says conscience, which joins in the reproof, ‘ you have ruined her—you have destroyed her reputation without making one effort to redeem her—you have assassinated her peace, overthrown her mental energy, and shortened her days : not only so, you have cast her son headlong down the same precipice you have hurled his mother. Your communication this day to the Reverend Dr. Allworthy has been, comparatively speaking, the throwing of her reputation down the Tarpeian

Rock, as in former times would have been the body of a malefactor, and from where none can be said to return and live : you have smothered both mother and son as in one gulf, the gulf of oblivion, or, rather, the gulf of perpetual infamy. Your malediction has been most severe and rash, as if you had never loved her and she had never loved you ; even false love is said to be endearing, but you have made it appear detestable, and an abominable principle that should be despised. Let no one woman henceforth say that a man loves her, or did love her, unless he is married to her, to bind him to her affections and she to him ; no other love or sympathy of the heart is safe ; jealousy intervenes and destroys what had been, but now remains no more. Short-lived joys,—indeed, guilty pleasures, which bring their own punishment and end now in her despair ! Behold her catching hold of her once idolizing Ardent, and dragging him also down the same precipice, as a reward for his perfidy. Before they descend the gulf, from which there is no receding with honour, I think I hear the public voice exclaim, “Stop them, pull them back, or they, in the struggle upon so perilous,—nay,

stupendous a height of human resentment, will destroy each other, and become public monitors to succeeding times.”

Ardent, in his mental visions, thought he beheld many friends interpose, but could not save them,—they were past recall; neither could the communication to the Reverend Dr. Allworthy be retracted. All that now remained to be done, or could be done, was to witness the gradual sinking of the one, and the interminable sorrows of the other.

Such a state of abstraction and distraction of mind, Ardent sustained within himself after the conversation which took place with the Reverend Dr. Allworthy, upon the immoral and licentious perversion of all rational principle, as had been recently evinced by the frail lady of his heretofore, as he imagined, unrivalled affections. It was painful for our hero to witness the gradual overthrow of that frame and beauty he had once so ardently admired, and to be a spectator of her sinking, perhaps, into a premature grave. It was more than his philosophy or fortitude could sustain without making at least one farther effort to redeem her from the consequences of her per-

verse conduct, before he suffered her to be torn from society for ever by her own folly and indiscretion.

In his mistaken motives of generosity, Ardent thought it was unmanly thus to sacrifice his early friend—her beauty and the frailty incident to human nature, pleaded her cause powerfully within his bosom; he could not be a silent spectator, and behold her gradually sink never to rise again—it was, he thought, inhuman. A gust of passion and perpetual resentment are widely distinct principles in the human breast. That he was susceptible of the former has been amply proved, but not so of the last; it would have required firmer nerves than he possessed, and less of the milk of human kindness than he had hitherto evinced in his composition, either mentally or corporeally. He was flesh and blood, as the Reverend Dr. Allworthy admitted himself to be; the doctor was afraid of a rencounter with the seductive arts of the syren, the sinner, and the saint, with all his experience and knowledge of morals, and, from his years, he may have been very naturally supposed to have had more of that moral philosophy, or natural discretion of the

mind, than was evinced by our hero ; still, our hero was, or had been, exposed to the full blaze of her beauty, before he could have been actually said to have possessed discernment sufficient to guide himself amidst such seductive allurements. He had frequently attempted to fly, knowing there was no other safety for him but in retreat ; to this his father was decidedly averse, for he was not aware of the mental agony the son endured, neither can it be conceived by any one but those placed in similar circumstances, for no pen can sufficiently express the human passions when once let loose ; and while each are struggling for the mastery, the good and ill principles of our nature too frequently prevail by turns, until the mind becomes a chaos of both real and imaginary creations, which undermine its peace and sometimes eventually terminates in insanity or other aberrations and peculiarly sensitive feelings, that are more of an agonizing nature than partaking of real comfort or enjoyment. Such are the indications of a mind diseased, or so morbidly alive to the excitement of the ideal fancies, creating for itself an Utopian existence, partaking less of the rea-

lities than the counterfeits of human existence, proving most incontrovertibly the old adage, "That human pilgrimage is a drama—individuals, the *dramatis personæ*—and the world, the stage."

Ardent, to have been a true philosopher, and proved his mind stronger than his animal nature, would have done well to follow the counsel of the Reverend Dr. Allworthy. The immaturity of his experience should have made him doubtful of himself, and caused him to place more reliance in the counsel of the worthy man, than have so soon sought for motives to disregard it, and even to oppose it in the full sense of the word, by exposing himself again within the atmosphere of Cupid's clime, rushing headlong upon destruction, and finally involving the woman he intended to save in his own ruin, or, rather, his in hers. It is true she may have been suffered to be overthrown by Divine Providence for her impiety and irreligion in making a jest of God's truths to man, and, above all, evincing by her conduct a total disregard of the marriage obligations; besides the many dangerous influences she had hitherto exercised with impunity upon society, all of

which there can be little doubt were registered in Heaven, and she was now to be brought to account for them—showing the destructiveness of the passion of unlawful love, and the vengeance Heaven directs against those who break through the commandments of God and the sacred obligations of the marriage vow.

CHAPTER XVII.

ON the following morning, the same mental agony assailed our hero as described in the last chapter. It is vain to conjecture the various perturbations and remorse that succeeded each other by turns, at one time condemning himself for his precipitancy, then endeavouring to justify himself by the benefit that an exposure of her practices to the Reverend Dr. Allworthy would do the immediate society of the neighbourhood ; and, indeed, it might be a benefit to the whole kingdom, by the discountenance it gave to vice and immorality, and especially in protecting the sacred obligations of the marriage compact. No individual but our hero or a madman would have hazarded himself again in the den of the lioness, as the reverend divine was pleased to call the house of Mrs. Freelove.

All the foregoing reasoning Ardent had with himself, instead of fortifying his mind, only served to awaken his sensibilities the more. She may

now have been truly considered on the verge of a precipice, and our hero was resolved to save her, if practicable, from the angry Dr. Allworthy ; for Ardent dreaded lest his resentment against her should be too severe, and not tempered with that due consideration for the infirmities of human nature that he now imagined to be her due, the principles of humanity not being confined to any class of individuals—so the divine precepts of the Saviour teach, provided they repent the error of their ways and lead a new life in future, not amending in words alone, but in deeds or actions also. Ardent now began to think that the Almighty could have reclaimed her without his interference or premeditating her downfall, for he could not have taken a more decisive step for her destruction than opening the eyes of God's minister, as he had done, making what was obscure before now become too apparent. Dr. Allworthy was apprehensive his own flesh and blood might have rebelled against him,—there was no temporizing with sin ; so he very wisely flew from the conversation of the tempter to immorality and licentiousness, while Ardent, fool like, still palliated her vices, and sought to

find excuses that he might again visit her and attempt to reclaim her before it was yet too late. This was the manner in which he reasoned with himself:—I have done the act of denouncing her as an enemy to man, and to myself in particular, whom I have quoted,—nay, produced, as an example; and those who know not the pangs I have undergone, would little conjecture I could be so true a prototype of all that is wretched in human existence. I find now it is too late; I have loved this pretty wicked woman too fondly—she was unworthy of such an attachment. She an exalted being! rather say she is the reverse of all that is amiable in women. A virtuous woman would have been true and spoken truth; but this frail lady has proved herself false in almost every instance in which I had placed confidence in her. It would have been better for me that she was an abandoned woman, with infamy stamped upon her forehead; then I should have been safe; but her milder virtues strangely prepossessed and blinded me, which is usually the case with those who are the votaries of Venus and the victims of Cupid. But this is battling with the shadows of the imagination, the judgment condemns a further

acquaintance with this profligate, and it is a false philosophy, as well as a want of sound reason and discretion, to think of saving her, now she is placed in the hands of the Reverend Dr. Allworthy. It would be the height of temerity and presumption to hazard an opinion contrary to his experience and superior knowledge of the world, and by endeavouring to save her I hazard not only her ruin but my own. She has repeatedly dared—nay, defied me, to break the chains and shackles she had thrown around me, yet this communication has been a forcible struggle for liberty and independence of mind; but who will prevail eventually is undetermined,—it is in the womb of time, and the fates, or Divine Providence, will sufficiently make it apparent in good season; perhaps it is now thus obscure for the especial purpose of fulfilling the destiny of Nature, or the will of the supreme director of all things. The Reverend Dr. Allworthy says I am as a brand plucked from the burning. I must confess, I think he is too severe upon her, and I could almost fancy him verifying the old adage, a burned child dreads the fire. I have a strong inclination to give her one further chance of

reforming herself before the final mandate of her destruction is sealed for ever. The doctor would say I was a rash young man, and condemn in no trifling manner my fool-hardiness in thus thinking again to venture into the lioness's den, and attempting to tame its ferocious inmate; but this is taking the worst possible view of the subject, and it remains to be proved which is most in the right. The worthy clergyman says she is completely irreclaimable, while myself think nothing impracticable within the bounds of possibility; for who would not be saved, or who would run headlong upon destruction? This communication of mine is the retributive justice which has been so long apprehended by her from my hands, knowing, as she did, her own imperfect conduct would not bear the scrutiny of minute investigation, and that I was too unpractised in deceit to expect that I should be a willing tool to enslave others to that degradation she had but too successfully brought upon myself.

Ardent eventually formed the resolution of once again calling to argue the impropriety of her continuing the practice of immorality, and that, if she would but change her conduct, he would hazard himself to save her.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE heroics of Ardent were of that inconsiderate description that nothing but a blind infatuated zeal could reconcile his conduct with reason and common sense. Dr. Allworthy's admonitory counsel was of a secondary nature. To save the woman he had partly destroyed was now the only consolation he could derive under existing circumstances, and having persuaded himself it was a duty of the first importance, he hesitated not to throw himself between her and the reverend divine, who had intimated his determination to remove her from the parish. It was, besides, a justice due to his own feelings, for could he look on quietly and see the poor lady suffering under public odium, however deservedly, without making one further effort to save her? It was possible she might make a full resolution to reform, and the persisting in such a resolution was all that was required by Ardent.

Such was the state of affairs and the insupport-

able nature of his reflections, that he compromised true propriety and real dignity of character for the purpose of offering again to restore her to society, and retrieve her from that state of degradation which the reverend gentleman was about to bring upon her by some invisible means or agency which Ardent himself was unapprized of. His intention was to offer his services to Mrs. Freelove, if she would consent to live that moral and religious life she had so often promised him she would, and which she had confirmed at the altar, in the presence of that Deity who is the searcher of all hearts and all understandings, from the merest connector of units to those more learned in the history of mankind from the earliest ages of the world, for imperfect is human knowledge at the best. His object was to inform her of her perilous situation, of the denunciations of the Reverend Dr. Allworthy against her, and that there was but one way of appeasing his resentment, which was by a sudden reformation of manners and conduct, or she must inevitably sink, never to rise again in human estimation ; unless, indeed, she received the homage of the depraved and entirely licentious, who

had neither regard for character or respectability. The doubt upon Ardent's mind was if Mrs. Free-love would feel herself obliged for his interference now that he had so far exposed her, unless, indeed, he controlled the destiny that awaited her, for he only now could save her : and such must be facilitated by her own good conduct in practising the self-denials, or nothing could avert the destruction. With such a pilot as Ardent, perhaps she would even then have been safe, that is, he would have saved her from the rocks, shoals, and quicksands that surrounded her, but then it was necessary to follow his counsel—for the vessel that will not obey the helm of the pilot in a storm will most probably be wrecked. Such was to be the fate of this hitherto fascinating woman : either she must yield to circumstances and live a more correct life in future, or be overwhelmed by the force of her own destiny. It was shortly to be determined, and for ever, if her good or evil genius presided ; and whether she would accelerate the one and impede the progress of the other, or, by being self-willed, lose that opportunity which presented itself of becoming in future an estimable character, and thus give

room for the malignancy of censure to pass away, and leave her to a life, if not without imperfection, at least without giving cause for fresh reproach.

The *pros et contras* of this reasoning have been already related. The grand object now to be achieved was how to accomplish this apparent inconsistency of ruining the woman of his regard, then in appearing before her after being her accuser, and again how the manner of such redemption of character could take place under any circumstances. Certainly, it could not without his co-operation and assistance, for he that had prepared the descent could either impede the progress of her career, facilitate its acceleration, or retard it by opposing obstacles insuperable to be overcome by the Reverend Dr. Allworthy, or a host of Dr. Allworthy's, combined and united to destroy her. But then her own conduct must assist, not by a perversion of mind and sentiment, but by a precisely opposite principle to that she had heretofore assumed, not of deception or assumed devotion, but by the practice of true piety, and a really religious exercise of the heart and mind. To sum up all,

she must, now and henceforth, prove herself a woman of sense, and not of folly and indiscretion: the amiable traits of her character must be brought forward and made so conspicuous that they should be apparent to all and doubted by none, not even by our hero, Argus as he was in the observance of her conduct,—that it should equal the sanctity of her pretensions, and not retrograde from such a state of character as might be called truly estimable.

This preliminary is somewhat necessary, for upon the present conduct of Ardent depended the future progress of this history. Since Ardent had unburdened his grief to his friend Dr. Allworthy, his heart had become lighter, it is true; but then he was pained by remorse for having exposed the individual he had so long respected, and thus making himself an accessory to the opinion of Dr. Allworthy, that she must be removed. It was but too apparent she was under a malediction of Ardent's own fixing upon her, and, however zealous he was to convince her of her dereliction from the principles she had professed, still his mind was not made up permanently to her total annihilation, without extending one

helping hand to save her. Ardent's perplexities were inconceivable: it appeared to him almost like making, or attempting to make, inconsistency appear consistent, or that the worst cause was capable of the soundest reasoning upon. It was rolling the stone up the hill of difficulty, rather than suffering it to descend; it was impeding the courser in the race; it was striving to stop the whirlwind of human passions, angry feelings, and resentments; it was, to say the least, a sort of knight-errant business or exploit to attempt to reclaim, even in idea, a vicious woman;—thousands had made such an attempt ere now, and thousands had failed, before even the very name of our hero was ever heard or thought of. But such are the mutable changes of events and incidents characteristic of the human character, that human life presents endless variety of light and shadow, reflecting and reflected, and, when judiciously blended, form the picture or landscape, or a prototype of those tremendous passions that assail human infirmities when not duly restrained by self-government and the command of reason. The stormy hurricane and tornado bear some resemblance in their ele-

mental wrath, to the angry feelings of parties coming in collision either when excited or repelled by human agency, or by the decrees of Omnipotence. Trying situations are the true elements to great minds, as they elicit those sparks of genius which either cannot or refuse to shine forth in less than the turbulencies of nature or the excitement of events of an artificial creation.

Ardent had accused her—it was now his wish to make that information nugatory, or of no importance, as concerned the character of Mrs. Freelove. He intended to prove that she repented of her conduct or that she justified herself: if the latter, his attempt to redeem or reclaim her was labour lost, and the reverend divine was to be fully empowered to eradicate the syren from the village and from seducing his flock ; for, like the satyr, with his oaten reeds, she but piped the dance of jocund merriment, and was gayly followed by all the swains of the village district. Thus stood the parties—the would-be defender of truth, religion, and justice on one side of the arena, and consummate artifice and deep scheming policy on the other ; for Ardent was but the instrument of human passions,—he was the auto-

maton of sensibilities and proprieties,—each had their contention for the governing his wayward, not to say wilful mind. No sooner was he convinced of the propriety of a step, than he acted upon it—whether right or wrong was not sufficiently attended to, provided it had the appearance of right, and he could justify himself in his own eyes and those of other people; and such was the impetus of his decision, that it often led him into errors which he severely repented of afterwards. It was this state of mind that made him occasionally the arbiter of his own destiny, and sometimes that of others; frequently he was but the effect, while others moved the master-springs of his actions, and impelled or excited him onward to develop those hidden springs or mysteries which govern individuals, society, and the world. He was the profoundest simpleton of modern times, eternally aiming to be right and as constantly in the wrong; a sort of Makeplot, Marplot, or Paul Pry, ever offering his services to the afflicted, and as continually reacted upon for his officious and meddlesome interference, until peculiar situations of the most surprising nature befell him.

The principles he professed to imbibe and disseminate appeared, as far as he could judge, different from the practice of the lady he had idolized, even when he thought there was a union of sentiment; but he found her love was of that copious and insatiable character, like the pluralists of our churches, who, it is said, can never have too much of a good thing, to the exclusion of the more modest and moderate pretender. Be this as it may, whether the parallel is always correct is immaterial,—that is, whether a lady (admitting of a plurality of lovers at one and the same time), usually stigmatized with an unpolite name, and which I am too cautious of giving offence to mention unprovoked, can be compared to other monopolists, I leave to others to determine; this I do know, that neither the Reverend Dr. Allworthy, nor the hereafter to be mentioned Reverend Mr. Aimwell, possessed such pluralities, and neither of them could be accused of monopolizing church preferment, the one having the gifts of fortune or patrimony with his rectory, and the other participating the kindness of Providence with the inconsiderable pay

of a stipendiary curate, and which he is supposed to have disbursed in charity.

The lady, the heroine of this history, was fond of adoration and attempting to seduce, as it appeared, all she could; she was unquestionably a woman of strong passions, disguised by dissimulation, so as not to make it appear she was the seeker but the sought after; this she accomplished by various stratagems, each, if possible, exceeding the other in ingenuity, so much so as nearly to have entangled the worthy pastor himself, according to his own confession.

This digression may be excused on the following principles—that of preparing the reader for those events that are to happen to the thoughtless Ardent, and the still more inconsiderate and unfortunate Mrs. Freelove, his late friend, patroness, and mistress. That such events had not been controlled by human reason, is, perhaps, to be lamented, but that such did occur is the more immediate province of this history to relate. A more able historian might doubtless have been selected, to give due importance to this mysterious history, so long concealed from the public. It is hoped that good may

result, that those who read it may say, “ I think myself a wiser, if not a better man.”

Knowledge is the growth of years, and the acquisition of any particular branch of wisdom is proverbially slow, requiring much observation and patient investigation in the acquiring, and no trifling tact or aptitude for the delineation. Now, whether this work is considered as a history or fable is immaterial, so long as the information is conveyed, for it partakes in appearance of both; all the incidents are real, and have been as painfully experienced as faithfully recorded. It is a development of the human passions, particularly intended to illustrate that mysterious department of our immoral habits—namely, mistress-keeping, or concubinage in this country, from the times of the influence of the Pope of Rome to the present era, embracing a period in the English history, as connected with this subject, of some hundred years.

The examples are brought forward for the purposes of intimidation to the hardened sinner, whether in high or low life it is the same thing—every class, as the high, the middle, or the lowest, are liable to be injured by immorality, whether

proceeding from themselves in the first instance or not. None can be brought into collision with immorality without becoming more or less injured in morals, principles, or happiness. Plurality in love, like other monopolies, is unnatural: nature never designed or framed mankind and reflective beings but in pairs, in common with the rest of her creation; and therefore, it is hoped, the delineation of the passion of unlawful love, or the infatuation of mistress-keeping, will assist to check the wild career of youth and thoughtless folly in future.

CHAPTER XIX.

ARDENT was experiencing such pangs of misery and remorse that were as bitter as any he had every intended to heap on the head of his perfidious and abandoned mistress ; and such was the vacillating and changeable condition of his mind, that he was now in a state of feverish restlessness till he had either averted the mischief which, through his own regretted impetuosity, was about to assail her, or, if too late to avert it, endeavour to rescue her, regardless of the opinion which Dr. Allworthy or others might form of such strange and unprecedented conduct, boldly avowing himself the champion of the lady's fame and honour ; and he came to this strange resolution under the erroneous idea that he might even yet reclaim her and save her character, although, perhaps, at the expense of his own. With this ambiguous yet Quixottic generosity floating in his mind, he once more turned his steps towards the magnetic house from which it

seemed impossible entirely to banish himself. Having arrived at what might truly have been styled Loadstone Hall, he was ushered into the presence of its magnetic mistress, who affected great displeasure at his unusually lengthened absence; and, by way of averting the vehement and deserved reproaches of her lover, she, with her usual tact and artifice, began her complaints by way of making it appear that she was the aggrieved party—but they shall speak for themselves, that the reader may form an unbiassed opinion of the merits or demerits of either party.

“Well, Ardent,” said the lady, “your absence has been longer than usual; what new vagary has entered into your mischief-making brains to cause so protracted a banishment? but I suppose you have had a return of the old disorder,—that, I mean, which is personified by a being with green eyes; really, it is very surprising that you should make such a mistake as to fancy that you are the party aggrieved, when all the time it is I have the greatest cause of complaint. I am really surprised at your assurance in presuming to prescribe rules for my conduct, and then fancying yourself ill used because I do not choose

to obey your imperious dictates—imperious, do I say? I should rather say selfish; for do I not know that all your anger towards me arises from my refusing to live a life of seclusion from all others, merely that I should devote myself wholly and solely to your captious and capricious will and pleasure? Upon my word, I cannot help admiring the extreme moderation of your desires or demands, and am only astonished that you do not require me to convert my house into a convent for young female devotees, that you may initiate them in the purity of your doctrines, and instil into their minds that you, and you only, could show them the way to Heaven; but that they must not follow any other prophets of your sex, if they would avoid damnation in this world or the next, for in your company alone was no sin. Such, I know, has always been the tenor of your sermons or discourses to me—for my good, as you called them, although I must confess I never thought them good, or, what is to me the same thing, agreeable enough to follow their advice.”

So far had the lady’s volubility proceeded, much to the annoyance of Ardent, who, fancying she had now come to something like a pause, hastily

seized the opportunity of taking his share in the conversation, before she again flew off to another tirade of invective and sarcasm, by way of defending herself before she was accused; or rather to avert the charge by becoming the accuser. He therefore began his part of the wordy affray in the following manner :—

“ I perceive, madam, that you have not lost any of your former ingenuity; indeed, it would be doing your talents an injustice to suppose you came to a momentary pause from a want of anything but breath; for to imagine so clever an artist as yourself lacked a flow of angry words when you knew an inquiry was about to be made into your conduct, or any outrageous impropriety reproved, would be accusing you of a want of *finesse*, which I know you to possess an abundance of. But this is your usual stratagem when you are aware that you deserve severe reproof and expect it accordingly: your mode is to make some fictitious accusation against me, that my attention may be occupied in defending myself rather than in accusing you; but this artifice has now lost its effect upon me, and I am no longer to be duped by so shallow a contrivance. You have deceived

and braved me often, and when you found my indignation aroused, you relented, or affected to relent, till I was somewhat pacified, in the fond hope that your repentance was sincere, and you were about to become the estimable woman my delighted imagination had once depicted you ; but you quickly dissipated the illusion by some dereliction of conduct even more glaring than those last repented of. Such outrageous acts of impropriety, and, I may say, impious profanation of all laws, human and divine, has completely worn out my patience, and destroyed every hope or expectation that you will ever reform or permanently repent of your profligate conduct ; indeed, my confidence in your discretion has at last become exhausted, and you have played me so many tricks that I came to a resolve to be no longer a silent spectator of those artifices which I observed were thrown out, not for the destruction of myself alone, but an endless number of others ; and, as I had unfortunately experienced their too complete success upon myself, I could no longer consent to give what I conceived a tacit sanction to your designing wickedness ; for, although

‘delusive hope still points to distant good,’ it appeared to me so far distant as never to be realized till the decrepitude of age should have become so apparent as to render all your lures of no effect, and excite no other sensations than those of pity and disgust ; for what sight can be more pitiable and disgusting than the dry and shrivelled remains of that beauty which, instead of blessing some worthy man while in its youthful splendour, had, on the contrary, exerted its baneful influence to lure numbers of unhappy votaries to destruction. I am aware that you possess a considerable share of good sense and discernment of right from wrong, which, combined as it is with so much artifice, only makes you the more dangerous, as it enables you to assume the appearance of what is praiseworthy and virtuous, by way of concealing the deformed and vicious parts in your character ; for you possess all kinds of stratagems and caprice. You first entangle lovers in your endearments, and then, when tired or satiated with them, are equally ingenious in removing them, by way of making room for a fresh supply of deluded votaries or victims. You cannot be surprised at the accu-

sation I now make, if you recall to mind the nature of your last engagement with me, when you resolved truly to repent of your former misdeeds, and dedicate your future life to piety and virtue. Not satisfied with merely informing me of your resolution, you desired me to accompany you to the holy altar, to witness the ratification of your vows of morality, and not only be a witness of the pious performance, but a follower also of so excellent an example—which I truly was in heart and mind. But what your own conduct has since been I need not inform you ; yet you must be aware that, from its bold and daring profligacy, our compact of respectful amity is at an end, and you, who were the first to propose it, have been the first to violate it ; indeed, you now appear to have determined on a perpetual change or succession of lovers, and seem resolved to outvie the Empress Julia, or, I believe I may say, Messalina herself ; or, by way of varying the similitude, I may consider you to be the Ogress in the fairy tale, who ensnared sleek and comely young men and then sacrificed them to her inordinate appetite. What say you, fair and frail madam, to my accusation,—have you

sufficient effrontery or contempt of truth to deny it?"

"No, Ardent, nor will I take so much trouble. On the contrary, I cannot sufficiently admire the extreme correctness of your delineation, and really must compliment you on your nice discernment of my peculiar tastes and habits: for, to tell you a truth (which, perhaps, you are already aware of), I have long made up my mind that my pretty person was not given me for nothing; and so, you know, I resolved on not burying my talent in the earth, or, what is the same thing, allow it to be useless and idle on the earth, that when any inquisitive person,—like yourself, for instance,—called me to give an account of it, I may say, as I now say to you, that I have done my duty towards it, and if it has not increased and multiplied, as, perhaps, might have been expected, why it was not my fault. And now, sir, have you any more questions to put to me? if not, I expect you will at once give me credit for my industrious traffic in my peculiar merchandise. What say you, Ardent? why, you appear lost in admiration of my unbounded talents."

“ Rather say, madam, I am lost in astonishment at your unbounded impudence ; is it possible you can be the same woman who once commanded my fervent admiration, indeed almost adoration, although it is true those sentiments were of very brief duration, for your depravity could not long endure the restraints of virtue, although in appearance only ; and I soon perceived with disquiet that the beauty I had admired was only a mask assumed for the purpose of hiding the vicious deformity that lurked beneath, the sight or knowledge of which you knew would scare away the worthy part of mankind. But I am yet to learn why you should carry your wickedness to such extremes as you have hitherto done ; for, if you must have a multiplicity of lovers, why not be satisfied with those whose principles are as loose as your own, and whose virtues and morals cannot be injured by becoming your devotees : surely, even that would be less sinful than profaning the sacred altars of the Deity, and making them subservient to your abominable designs. There are, unfortunately, numbers of depraved beings among the male part of mankind, and, as you are of a similar disposition,

there would be less of premeditated wickedness and odium, in confining your favours to that class of individuals, than in seducing those young men, who are seeking a virtuous partner for life, and destroying their prospects and peace of mind, in this world at the least. What can be the motive of thus unnecessarily increasing the enormity of your sin?"

"Amusement, to be sure; of which you, Ardent, with your silly and pusillanimous scruples, have afforded me a tolerable sufficiency, although, to confess the truth, you were sometimes more troublesome than amusing; and as I began to be somewhat tired of your hot and cold fits, combined with your perpetual ding-dong about propriety of character, observance of decency, and other kinds of the same mawkish nature, I was compelled to look out for a change of company, by way of variety."

"Shameless woman! your matchless effrontery surpasses even the worst thoughts I had ever entertained of you, even in my bitterest moments of anger towards you. Oh! had I known your real character, when I first beheld you, what heartfelt sorrow and pangs of regret should I not have escaped! It is true, I was told there was a mystery

about your character, which none could find out ; and therefore was I warned against contracting too intimate an acquaintance with you, but I neither heeded or believed the friendly advice. Indeed, who would have believed it, that saw you act, and heard you speak as you did, when I first knew you ? Alas ! that I should ever awake, and find it but a dream, or alas, that ever I should have fallen into so delusive a sleep ! In you, I thought I saw a personification of religion and virtue, for you were ranked as a patroness of social duties, and under that amiable character, I sought your acquaintance ; I appealed to you as my best friend, in an affair of the utmost importance to my welfare, and in that affair you proved yourself, whether intentionally or otherwise I know not, my worst enemy. You have upbraided me with not loving you so devotedly as I once did, but I deserve not blame on that account ; for can it be expected I can love one, whose beauty of heart and mind is deformed by some of the most vicious and depraved propensities that reflect disgrace upon the human character. You perfectly mistook me, when you selected me for your companion in wickedness : you fancied, if you could once succeed

in bending my mind to your own crooked principles, it would always retain that degraded direction; but you misunderstood its characteristics,—it was but as the reed, which bent only for a while to the destroying elements that assailed it, but was not totally crushed. I thank heaven for preserving my principles from that state of utter degradation to which you apparently wished to sink them. What adds to my surprise, is, that you should all at once have become so utterly regardless to the preservation of appearance of that character, about which you were once so solicitous. Even for the sake of your own peace and quiet, you should study to observe some kind of consistency. Why, with all your artifice, you are but half an actress, for what woman, who entertained the least respect for even common decency of appearance, would have retained a young man in her house for three weeks, as you have Captain Racket, to the great displeasure of his aunt, Mrs. Goodwill, who, I do assure you, feels highly indignant at your astonishing impropriety. Really, one would imagine that you are striving, to the utmost of your ability, to open the eyes of the public as to the reality of your principles, and they will feel doubly surprised

at the total indifference to character in one, who used to be so solicitous about its apparent preservation. Let me ask you, if you are vain or weak enough to suppose a pretty woman may do anything, however improper, with impunity? If so, you miserably deceive yourself, for the world, bad as it is, still retains its respect for at least an appearance of order and propriety, and it is a true axiom, that those who disregard the public censure, will, in time, have so much of it heaped upon them, as to overwhelm them with confusion, if not utter ruin."

" I mention all this, with a latent hope that you will be convinced of the errors of your conduct, and, in consequence of that conviction, lead such a life of rectitude and morality in future, that all your former misdeeds shall be not only forgiven, but forgotten. As it is, if you possessed ever such staunch friends of respectable character, they would now abandon you, in reprobation of your gross immorality; for how could they, in justice to their own characters, frequent a house which your last indiscretion alone (setting all others aside) has made infamous? Could you not be satisfied with your old conquests, without seeking to extend

them *ad infinitum*, for in your rapacious mode of collecting lovers, you are creating a host of enemies, instead of friends as you call them, and by such means are becoming a nuisance to society, and a public pest. I have argued thus far as your friend, unmixed with the distraction or jealousy of the lover; for to suppose I should continue to love you, after the scandalous and public display of your daring depravity of principles, and that in defiance of every thing I could urge, to bring you to a correct mode of life, would be highly erroneous. It is true, I loved you once more than I ever loved woman, or perhaps ever shall again, and far better would it have been for me, if I had never so loved, for it was only such an impetuous and short-lived passion as the artful wanton alone could have inspired, and which, unfortunately, I could not guard against, as I only knew there was such a woman by report. But again, let me caution you against continuing in your present mode of life, ere it is too late to repent; for let me tell you, the Reverend Dr. Allworthy is at last apprised of your conduct. His surprise and sorrow were excessive, when he was informed of your transgressions, but he will take proper means, in

future, to counteract or prevent their evil influence. You cannot be surprised at the Reverend Divine's knowledge of your misdeeds, which was made by myself, for I had long forewarned you of my intentions, unless you abandoned your profligate mode of life, and turned to one of a more respectable nature. Even now, a sincere repentance and reformation may avail you much in making your peace with the worthy divine, whom you have so wickedly deceived, for I assure you, he considers it no trifling evil to have placed such a woman at the head of his little flock, and although he cannot possibly allow of your remaining as their Directress, yet, if you sincerely repent, and endeavour to atone for past errors, the mild and christian-like disposition of the reverend gentleman would not utterly abandon you to the scorn and contempt of an unpitying world, but would support and encourage you in your new-formed resolutions, and perhaps benevolently do his utmost to screen you from the contumely of an incensed public, whose morals you had done your utmost to undermine."

During this long harangue of our hero, the countenance of the lady had worn a scoffing smile, but directly he came to that part which spoke of

his having apprised Dr. Allworthy of her misconduct, her countenance changed to an expression of extreme alarm, and during the remainder of his exhortation, had sunk to an appearance of the deepest despondency; then turning to her former lover, with a look of imploring anguish, she exclaimed “O! Ardent, you have ruined me, you have now destroyed me in earnest. I did not think you would have been so cruel to a poor defenceless woman you once loved, and whose principal failing has consisted in loving you too well. Can nothing be done to save me? O think, Ardent, on some plan of saving me from the destruction you have brought upon me, and I will be every thing you can wish me to be,—I will repent, I will reform, I will be sincere in my piety to God, and truly observe his commandments; indeed, I will do any thing you require, if you will but save me, which I ask, not only for my own sake, but that of my unfortunate son.”

“Indeed, I pity you, Mrs. Freelove, but why not have said this before? I have given you sufficient warning of my intention; why did you not heed it, and stop your career of dissipation in time to stay me from that disclosure which would

banish you from all respectable society, for wives tremble for their husbands, and fathers and mothers for their sons, while such contagious influence remains in their vicinity.

“For God’s sake, Ardent, think on some speedy method of saving me! You surely cannot refuse, for have I not promised you, that I will be a christian in word and in deed? My disposition has always been with God, but my ungovernable passions and affections have misled me.”

“I cannot save you, Mrs. Freelove, it is now utterly out of my power, and every thing must now depend on an alteration in your own conduct.”

“No, Ardent, that will be of no avail, without your co-operation and assistance; fly to the Reverend Dr. Allworthy, retract all you have said, tell him you were jealous, and induced to say what you did from anger and resentment, arising from some trifling dispute, and which you are now sorry for.”

“Nay, Mrs. Freelove, again you mistake my character, for I neither can or will tell a lie, for man or woman, even were they ever so dear to me; therefore, you must think on some more eligible mode to save yourself and son, for the utmost I can now do for you, is to request the Reverend Dr.

Allworthy will moderate his anger towards you, and not proceed in a way that will bring down ruin upon you,—that he will consider human nature is frail in the best of us, and that whatever erring deviations from the paths of rectitude and morality I had charged you with, are now sincerely repented of by yourself, and that you have come to a solemn determination to amend your life, and not farther transgress both human and divine laws. As a gentleman, he cannot do otherwise than attend to my recommendation, which will stay all active proceedings, and you, in the mean time, will have an opportunity of proving to him the sincerity of your repentance and reformation, in which, if you fail, no farther commiseration or lenity will, or ought to be, shewn towards you. Therefore, relying on the fidelity of your promised improvement, I will speedily make my request in writing to the reverend divine, and hope it may be serviceable to you.”

“Do, Ardent, pray do, and directly you know the result, come and inform me of it, for positively I can no longer appear in church, or indeed at all in public, till you have written the letter, and removed some of those impressions which may be formed against me; and, dear Ardent, would it not

be better to contradict as much as you can conveniently, by way of farther security to my character? You know there can be no sin in a little harmless fibbing, when it would be of so much importance to my welfare."

"I am sorry to hear you say so, Mrs. Free-love, as it shows a laxity of principle, and a system of prevarication, which I fondly hoped you had resolved on discarding; and depend upon it, you will never find fibbing, as you call it, to be in any way serviceable to your character or reputation, for, when the falsity is detected, and it seldom fails of being so, the liar is overwhelmed with an increased portion of odium and contempt, in addition to the censure for those other delinquencies which the lie was intended to refute. Besides, I do not possess that unblushing front, and shameless hardihood of manners, so necessary to the liar; I am not hardened in sin, nor has my conscience become callous to the dictates of veracity and honour, and how could I ever again stand in the presence of a man of such rigid morals, after offending him by the unpardonable acknowledgment that I had told wanton lies to his very face? No, madam, farther than I have promised you, I

cannot perform, for I have too much respect for justice, truth, and all the virtues, to confront him to his teeth, and evade, or even attempt to evade, the most distant resemblance to truth, which is treading so nearly on the heels of falsehood, as scarcely to admit a shadow of difference to be perceived, but by those who are well acquainted with the synonyma of words. I propose to go great lengths to meet your wishes, but over such a boundary line as that of truth, I cannot pass, or even trespass on its margin, or within the shadow of its limits. Therefore, ask me not to deny your farther solicitations, which indeed I must, were they but to exceed the hair's breadth of what I have hitherto proposed, as it would be the total overthrow of my respectability and rank as an honourable man.

“ I think, I have convinced you by this time, I am capable of going a great way to oblige you, but not to forfeit all I hold dear on earth, my character for veracity. Some of those sound principles I formerly possessed, you may have warped to a certain degree; that is, I am already obliged to descend to something very like equivocation, or retract, to a certain extent, my former opinion, as expressed to the Reverend Dr. Allworthy,

which is a painful task to fulfil, and is, in fact, partly compromising my own character to save yours."

"Then, Ardent, you will not fail to write to the Reverend Dr. Allworthy, which, you know, will very much oblige me."

"That I will take upon myself to do, madam, although I am fully aware I risk the displeasure of that good man, while I am still very much in doubt of the reasonableness of my conduct, and of the responsibility attached to my own character, as a man of honour. To save you in this advanced stage of the business, is in part to sacrifice myself,—of that I am very well assured. But you are of that sex, whose character, once lost, cannot be recalled, or replaced. I may retrieve mine, when it is considered that my motives are influenced by the principles of humanity, which are more particularly due to one I formerly loved.

"You are a drowning woman,—you were out of your depth before I spoke to the reverend divine, but as it does not appear natural for me to accelerate your sinking, and drive you to despair, I will extend my helping hand, rather than withdraw it again to uphold and bring you forward as a res-

pectable woman ; and if not unaccused of having been culpably disreputable, yet your future conduct should be such as not to become the public talk and the public scandal. As I have frequently remarked before, respect yourself, then you will be respected, and not by vicious conduct shake that reputation you once possessed, which alone induced the Reverend Dr. Allworthy to appoint you patroness to his school. May you become a respectable woman, if it was only for your son's sake, as you have very properly considered and alleged the concern you have for his welfare, which does your heart and understanding the greatest credit, and in so doing you are the promoter of your son's happiness, which will give you a lasting satisfaction, for it is the highest of all the moral virtues to let your conduct be such as will secure his welfare. In fact, your son's and your own respectability are so nearly allied, that they cannot be divided, but at the utmost risk and peril to both.

“ Your feeling so emphatically for your son is your strongest recommendation with me, to interest myself in your future respectability and usefulness ; nor will I bear in mind the injury you

may have done to others, so long as a hope remains that there may be no repetition of the like offences against morals and the peace of society. All the good traits in your character must be brought forward in formidable array, before that good man, as a breastwork and defence, that cannot be stormed, or borne down with impunity, that he may not think it easy to overwhelm you with shame, infamy, and contempt, as a disgrace, not only to yourself, but all others giving or yielding you the least countenance. He entertains a doubt of your being possessed of any good traits of character, but I think it will soon be fully proved, either that you have sufficient remaining to assist my upholding them, or that you have not. He does not believe you have any, and proposes to denounce you accordingly to the world, as the veriest profligate that could contaminate the neighbourhood, and even the kingdom.

“I think the Reverend Dr. Allworthy gives you more credit for viciousness of principles than I do myself. You certainly have proved yourself a silly foolish woman, abounding in too much thoughtlessness for your own peace, or that of others. Malicious, I will not dare to think you,

for was I to entertain that idea, I could not defend you; it is well you are not malignant and resentful, or all would condemn you, that are not themselves abandoned. A furious and enraged woman is a sort of anomaly in human nature, which should never be heard, or even thought of, as possible to exist, and still less to be supposed residing in yourself. It is by mildness you have conquered and subdued that disposition I had to injure you and your son, or rather to defend others, which I had supposed to be necessary, from your machinations and deceitful conduct. But let me hope it is not yet too late for you both to become amiable characters, and that my sanguine hopes of you will not be again deceived or disappointed."

"The anger of an enraged woman is insatiable as the grave, or at least never resting until she has destroyed her victim or herself; of all things, suffer me to persuade you against malignancy, or resentful feelings, for they will surely destroy you, as they would have done upon the present occasion, had you been violent, for then I could not have stood up as your defender, and asserter of those virtues you really are endowed with;—let

me hope, usefully so, for all that is required of you is, to remove away the more destructive parts of your character, and cease in future to seduce others as you have done myself. Therefore, let me, upon this trying occasion, persuade you against anger or vindictiveness, lest, by a second accusation, I confirm what may yet appear doubtful. I propose to extend my fostering care of you so far as to qualify what I have hitherto said, not by contradiction, for that would be despicable, but to suspend the purport of the information already given to Dr. Allworthy, that he may not proceed against you with his anger, neither can any one else. So remember, upon your future conduct will depend my malediction : not the past, for that is forgiven, or looked over, as if it had not happened, except a sigh now and then, that I should have embraced the shadow, rather than the substance of real joy,—the ideal happiness, as pictured to my imagination, rather than the solid happiness that would have been confirmed to me by marriage, and fulfilling the counsel of my father. And believe me, if I a second time condemn you, you are totally a lost woman, for who would then again believe me, if I tried to save you, as I

should have overthrown my evidence in the estimation of all good men. May Heaven divert you from any intention to mislead me in your principles, now solemnly appealed to, on the part of yourself and son, for it would not only prove the weakness of your mind, but the depravity of your heart, or of your affections, as you call them.

“ I give you this counsel, more particularly as it may become useful to you in the guidance of your conduct, for the negotiation now pending is, whether you are to be considered a respectable woman or not. I confess, I think this will be a very arduous task, to establish again in the mind of the Reverend Dr. Allworthy, and must be greatly facilitated, on your part, by practising the mildest manners, and evincing the most exemplary conduct; for, if not seconded by your own good example, all I could say would be of no use, even if I was to go to the extremes you wish me to do, which I hope God will defend me from ever thinking of.

“ This present hostility of the worthy Doctor, I think, I can stop, or at all events suspend, until you by your good conduct make an impression on his injured, not to say outraged feelings, for it

will be more difficult to calm his vigilance than mine, inasmuch as he has twenty years' more experience to confirm his judgment, which I am deficient in ; therefore, conduct yourself respectably in future, such as he shall approve, and by so doing you secure the good opinion of all good men and women.

“ I have the misfortune of seeing but partially the ways of life : my experience up to the present period, in the science of the human heart, is very limited. But still I will hope the best, and endeavour to guard not only myself, but you against the worst ; follow my counsel, then you, may be safe ; neglect it, and you will be undone ; both you, and your son also.”

“ I thank you, Ardent, for your long lecture upon morals. Had the Reverend Dr. Allworthy himself preached it from the pulpit, it could not have been more appropriately delivered ; but coming from a young man, as you are, and my former lover, I am almost inclined to laugh in your face, at your assumption of gravity, and your Solon-like lawgiving. Had Lycurgus risen from the dead, or again made his appearance in our modern Sparta, he would not have excited greater

astonishment in this little world of wonder. I beg I may be recorded in history, as having been present at the new discovery in morals, as applicable to my most unworthy self, with the recollection that the satyr of this far-famed Windsor Forest, is now become reclaimed, and holding forth moral lectures for the welfare of mankind, and leaving poor isolated me unconsolated, uncomforted, and unadorned, even with the semblance of that virtue he is so confident, is conducive to happiness, prosperity, and longevity.

“ Most sage sir, for I cannot help bantering you in my turn; you are exactly the individual I took you to be, but mind, don’t forget the letter, to the Reverend Dr. Allworthy, for upon that letter will now depend our subsequent fame in these romantic regions.”

“ I am inclined to believe, Mrs. Freelove, your intention is to be serious, but really you have a singular way of shewing it, but nevertheless I will perform my promise concerning you, that of writing to the Reverend Dr. Allworthy.”

CHAPTER XX.

ON the same evening that Ardent had left the house of Mrs. Freelove, with the promise of writing to the Reverend Dr. Allworthy for the purpose of mitigating that good man's resentment towards her, behold this imprudent, for immoral young man he can scarcely be called, with a Quixote-like independence of mind, endeavouring to stem the storms and angry feelings he himself had created, to quell the jarring discord of grating feelings which possessed the reverend divine in his endeavour to extirpate immorality and licentiousness of principle from his parish; while Ardent, with equal zeal, but from mistaken motives of philanthropy, was zealous in the cause of upholding her against the worthy divine, with his already formed opinions decisive of her being an immoral character in the fullest sense of the word. He was quickly seated with the implements of writing before him, and exercising his meditative faculties to comprehend events, for

they were the most wonderful that had ever challenged his attention or exercised his discernment, which was never considerable. Simplicity was a part of his character,—not the simplicity of artifice, for the purpose of destroying another, for that is only assumed; but the really genuine simplicity of nature, proceeding from ignorance and a want of due information upon the subject he was about to discuss with the Reverend Dr. Allworthy, and which is the most dangerous of all simplicity to designing characters; for they, presuming upon the ignorance of the man, or his want of information upon given subjects—as that of their own vice or knavery—take him to be a fool, and practise on his simplicity accordingly, and often to their own cost eventually; for no sooner does he find out that his judgment has been imposed upon, than he retaliates, with interest, their own machinations upon themselves; not by the same artifice, for that is impracticable, but by disclosing their principles, so as to enable others, more experienced, to form a judgment, and thus renders himself useful to society by betraying inadvertently, or in his own defence, the matchless manœuvres of his consum-

mate antagonists,—not in folly, but in viciousness, which they have been able to pass off upon the world through their cunning as correct conduct.

This reasoning is more particularly addressed to those capable of combining ideas upon morals and principles, and not for the every-day reader of novels or romances ; but as it is the intention of the author to write so as to be understood, he must desist from metaphorical language, allusions, or abstruse reasoning upon moral causes producing natural effects, as such language would be in general too serious for the generality of readers, or as others, perhaps with more propriety, would say, too tiresome.

To return to our hero, seated, as we will suppose, in his arm-chair, grave in deportment, and about to become, without his own knowledge, a moral lecturer of the very gravest cast ; for he not only wrote theoretically, but actually experienced what he wrote, and which is now produced with suitable formality for the benefit of young men.

With pen in hand, he hesitated ; and while he hesitated about what he should say, or what he ought to say,—or rather not say, and certainly

not write, the following mental review of the affair passed his mind ; therefore, laying down his pen, he conversed with himself, as was his usual practice, from the want of another companion with whom he could interchange ideas ; for, as has been repeatedly before remarked, his mind and constitutional habits were of too ardent a nature or character to suffer him long to remain idle, for if at any period of his life he was disengaged from the active pursuits of life, his mind, like a pendulum, began reverberating backwards and forwards, until he elicited something like what he meant to say or do, not unlike the minute and hour hand of a timepiece : the minute hand may be compared to point out time as ideas flashed before our hero's judgment ; and, when confirmed by the judgment, may have been said to strike the hour. In this state of cogitation or mental anguish, for all thoughts difficult to comprehend, even by the agitator himself, are painful, particularly to those whose faculties have not been exercised before upon the subject, or in that particular form or singular manner ; hence are judges of the land paid 6000*l.* a year for their thoughts, besides other perquisites, amounting to as much

more; privy counsellors 40,000*l.* a year, as being still more important; and counsellors or pleaders, particularly special pleaders, perhaps it would be no exaggeration to say 100*l.* per hour. But Ardent, in his pursuit of wisdom, both experimental and theoretical, as well as cogitational, was not so amply remunerated as could have been wished, unless, indeed, the blows of fortune may have been considered his reward; in such case he had no reason to complain of any deficiency, as this history will satisfactorily convince the most confirmed sceptic. Not to consume too much of our reader's time, and delay the advancement of this work by bestowing gratuitous elucidation upon other matters not connected with this history, we begin with giving our hero's thoughts upon the present posture of affairs that engaged his attention previous to commencing the writing of that formidable letter to the Reverend Dr. Allworthy, as before alluded to.

“In the calm of cool reflection,” said Ardent, “I apprehend I have been excessively wrong in going near Mrs. Freelove's house again, after the serious communication I made to the Reverend Dr. Allworthy. That good man will think I am

trifling with his sacred character, and that I do not sufficiently respect my own. An unfortunate woman intervenes, she pleads for herself and son—I wish I could say a virtuous woman. O, had she been but virtuous, I should now have been a happy man,—happy in her friendship, in her society—possibly a married man, although not married to herself, and with a tender blossom clinging round its parent stem, imbibing virtue, and herself my benefactress. But I am to write a letter, the occasion requires it. A woman has fallen, styled by some of the villagers Lady Freeloze. Is it then so very uncommon that ladies of title should stumble in their elevation? and, soaring to reach exalted happiness, and aiming, perhaps, at that bliss which is not to be met with in this sublunary world, fancying themselves angels, they attempt to fly to the regions of exalted happiness, and great is their fall, which frequently inflicts incurable wounds upon their reputation, for they cannot transgress God's commandments with impunity. But the woman I allude to is only a lady of title by courtesy, or ignorance, deemed to be such by poor people, from her benevolent kindness and virtues, for charity covers

a multitude of sins ; and that they may atone for the past transgressions is my humble prayer. A woman has fallen, a son's prospects are blasted, and through myself, or rather herself, and her own immorality. Can I consistently write to so good a man ? I have pledged my word, and my word must be observed ; it is so with every honest man ; besides, let me hope it is exerting myself in the cause of humanity, and alleviating the affliction arising from human woe. It is not love or infatuation that now urges me forward to the vindication of this woman in her hour of trial, distress, ruin, and despair. My sympathy arises from pity, which is said to be nearly allied to love ; be it so. It is true she has some good traits in her character, or bad she must be indeed. I have heard his satanic majesty can make himself agreeable, and is familiar with many fine ladies in high life, although they little suspect the black gentleman to have had any influence over them, until they find his cloven foot brought forward before the public eye, and which has given rise to many a *crim. con.* action in our ecclesiastical courts of law ; all the world then sees his deformity plain enough. She is sorrowful, she says, and I am to

be the Samaritan to heal up her wounds and tranquillize her wounded spirit; let me hope it is not too late. Her beauty, her good nature, may in part have assisted her downfall. A beautiful woman is as a statue upon a pedestal, liable to be thrown down by the blind mole undermining its foundations, or from a sudden blast of the tempest, and then is trod under feet by the community, and lastly by the commonalty.

“ I was going to write, and how to begin I know not, for the very shame and scandal of the affair. It is true I have not calumniated this woman; so far, I am not blameable. But is it commendable to be her apologist? I fear not; common prudence requires no such sacrifice of myself. I have given her warning repeatedly, but she regarded it not. What! I may say, and others will say, defend vice and immorality? God forbid! and the immortal who scrutinizes all hearts, knows that I am actuated by the principles of humanity and kindness. She is a human being, and at least deserving of christian charity. She has sinned, and so have we all; and he that is perfect let him cast the first stone. So sayeth the Saviour of the world. It may be said the devil quotes Scripture upon

occasion, as in cases of emergency like the present, when he is in difficulty to find good qualities or motives to set free one of his fair enslavers; for, like all other personages less renowned, he has his troubles,—so it is affirmed, as well as those who call themselves human beings; and if he is only an imaginary personage, created by our own apprehensions, fears, and weaknesses, still he is a useful being to govern the imaginary world of spirits. These reflections are deviating from the point of letter-writing. This formidable letter,—to be, or not to be? the mandate of condemnation to myself, herself, or both of us. What have I to say? What can I say? It is not the part of a wise man to write in defence of vice. Is man never to be stamped upon my forehead in those distinguishable lines of sense and discretion? Must I ever prove a Marplot, and attempt to set that world right which is always wrong? I have gone great lengths within a short period of time; my career has been swift, the racer not surpassing in speed my boundless folly. But there must be an end,—the ways of vice are past finding out. I am recovering my sense of propriety by degrees, my sleeping virtue is now awake, and it seems to me as if designed by Providence, or the

fates, I know not which, that I should again uphold her by my counsel, at least so it appears to me, and give encouragement to honesty by my example ; in fact, nothing would give me greater pleasure than seeing mankind united in the bonds of social compact, to repress the career of wickedness and extend the helping hand to sinking virtue. All this appears reasonable, but is it practicable? Am I not deluding myself by my imagination,—and will the result be as I wish? Will the judgment in after time approve, or will it condemn me? To reason like a sensible man is one thing, to act like one is another. Surely, never was man placed in such a trying situation before; to reconcile contradictions, and attempt to make vice appear like virtue, and virtue to resemble vice. Rather say, headstrong Ardent, as you are, your folly will make itself apparent, and the questionable honours you expect to reap from this affair may embitter your peace for ever. But the letter ! what has hitherto been said is only the preliminary, the *avant courier*, the preface to this formidable letter-writing; the seal, perhaps, of her doom, or my own, or both. To write a letter of this

description, requires a mind hacknied in the ways of the world ; to such pretensions I have no claim, —I am timid, I am wavering, and hesitate before I commit so glaring an incongruity. Retract ? no, not retract ; but to render my information useless. Even this requires some ingenuity and dexterity with the pen, as well as of the thinking faculties, to render to this sinking woman the services she requires of me. I have made an agreement with her that it is not to be at the expense of my honour, my word, or my reputation, all of which would have been overthrown at once by only one single fallacy. It is somewhat excusable in her requesting me to tell an untruth, or some softer name I think she called it ; the haste, the hurry, the flurry of the moment,—a thousand incidental circumstances crowding upon her mind, may have put her off her guard ; and, scarcely knowing what she did, required me to prop up her sinking reputation by the sacrifice of my own,—a very moderate demand, truly ; for such would inevitably have been the consequence had I consented to have told only one single falsity.

“ But such is the force of language and the

power of words judiciously selected and well chosen, that they will often make the worse appear the better cause. It was so in Shakspeare's time, and has descended, as if by instinct, to the present race of mankind. Those long practised in disseminating principles and sentiments would find no difficulty, but it is far otherwise with me. I am inexperienced and unpractised in letter-writing, as well as in controversy and casuistry, which I think I have sometimes heard called jesuitical, which, I believe, means not sincere, but evasive, or avoiding a painful truth, to prevent the necessity of telling a lie, where truth, like the sun passing over a deep embowering wood, cannot enter, or the secret shade that is hid would become as a noonday beam, apparent to the feeblest sight and obvious to the weakest understanding. In such situation I am now placed by my hitherto captivating, prepossessing mistress, for whom I have run mad; and even now some of the thoughtless part of mankind are hastening onward to the same goal, as if nothing pleased but a woman's toy, or the ring of Hans Carvel, which was said never to be in safe keeping but when his finger was therein lodged, to the exclusion of all other pretenders.

“But I am a novice in lady’s love, or a lady of whose sanctity and pretensions to morality I am now become too well acquainted with; and, as I have run the gauntlet of sentiments, tender addresses, and the softest of adieus, I am called upon to prove myself a man and defend the fair for whom I have sighed. I am now required to wield a more formidable instrument than the sword, and, let me hope, a more influential one, to divide with the pen sentiments and opinions; and so to bewilder the imagination and the judgment of this good man, the Reverend Dr. Allworthy, of pious functions and attributes, as to influence him not to animadvert or overthrow that trifling thing called a woman of no reputation, until I in my omnipotence give the word, and then only. This heroic stand I now make, as on the point of a rock or precipice, will immortalize my name; for am I not engaged in the cause of sinking virtue? and, however small is the appearance of it, still it is worth one trial to bring it forward, and make it known to the world that neither impetuosity or haste shall be attributed to me or my cause. And if she has only one spark of virtue remaining, it will catch

hold, as it were, of my enthusiasm in the cause of virtue, honour, and public happiness: but enough of banter even with myself, for my subject is serious. Is it my better genius striving to overrule my evil destiny, or is it the decree of Divine Providence that thus propels me forward, perhaps to my own ruin, as a warning to others how they stumble into the like pitfalls of inconsiderate regard for a voluptuous woman and an unfaithful one.

“ If I am an instrument of the chances and hazards of life, be it so,—I fulfil my destiny, for I must make one effort to save her, if it was only on the principles of humanity. Setting aside my former regard and remembrance of endearments, where is the lover who would not venture on one imprudent step to save a devoted victim? My victim is sinking—I have thrown her down the precipice—I repent—extend my hand, grasp hold of her garments, and bring her again safe to the solid rock on which I endeavour to keep my station, the basis of which is principle: honourable principles will uphold man and woman, without principles him or herself must perish,

and who has the greatest share will now shortly be evinced.

“What I have to resolve and determine upon is, that my arguments shall have a foundation to rest upon, let the event be how it may; and that foundation shall be the truth, as opposite to sophistry as light is to darkness: the one is the shadow, the other the substance, of moral worth; the former is the foundation of principle, the latter only the reflection. The groundwork or foundation of my future character shall be imbedded deep and affixed to the rock of human principles, in a figurative sense, like that which sustains this island against the roar of the tempest, or the ocean’s rage lashing our sea-beat shore: thus far they may come, but Divine Providence prevents their further subduing the rocks that breast them, as human virtue resists the immoral principles that surround it. The superstructure of my fame only now remains to be elevated, like another Pompey’s or Trajan’s Pillar, to be an object of attention, far more durable than monumental stone or brass; securing me that existence in the republic of morals exceed-

ing the fame of one who slaughters humanity, for the character of a moralist cannot be trampled into the earth by adverse fortune, but, like Cicero, who subdued the Cataline conspiracy, and not only prevented its baneful effects but proved himself a pillar of wisdom in all after time. A casuist would here stay, ‘Stop, friend Ardent, your reasoning appears to be too abstruse, and may not be conclusive. There is nothing like examining both sides of an argument; the one is admitted to be just until the other proves the contrary. Now, query, has not the subject you are discoursing upon so familiarly with yourself, and bandying words about, the appearance of inconsistency? for, as you know well enough, reason is often tried by the powers of ridicule: let any cause stand not only a scrutinizing inquiry, but the test of ridicule, and it is granted to be invulnerable, for where reason cannot overthrow, the jest of ridicule often will prevail.

“Attend then, Ardent, to the following.—If you can make Mrs. Freelove appear worthy of your ill-judged lenity, I will for one confess you are deserving of that immortality you have so boast-

ingly promised yourself; and, as there is many a true word spoke in jest, I will consider all you have said as deserving of durable records, agreeable to your own prophetic vision. Again I put the question, has not your subject a rotten foundation to stand upon ?

“ I must say,” replied Ardent to his imaginary debater or wrangler, “ it looks very like it to a superficial observer of causes and events ; but still I have not made the experiment, therefore it would be judging *à priori*, if not forestalling the question, and entering upon a condemnation before the attempt is made to plead her cause before one so much more experienced in moral causes as the Reverend Dr. Allworthy. It is at present but a mere conjecture that I can frame a letter so as to please myself and others, but which will be soon submitted to the proof. A person more experienced than myself would immediately determine upon its merits or demerits, whether it partakes more of the active or passive principle of benevolence and humanity, or whether it can be said to have any humanity at all for its basis ; for it is an admitted fact, that no case admits of ill that good may come, or good

that may produce mischief. To what extent is the motives or springs to this apparently absurd and even contradictory conduct, denouncing one minute and vindicating the next, which more than brings into question the sanity of the reasoning I am about to enforce ; for the suspension of that good man's resentment against the falling fortunes or rather falling off of principle in this wicked and profligate woman."

" Friend Ardent," rejoined the imaginary wrangler, " your proposal of saving this falling woman may be commendable in itself, on the principles of humanity and Christian feeling ; but, for my own part, I perceive no human probability of your success, and so your better judgment would say was it not influenced or controlled by the tender passion, or regard you formerly had for this woman, and still have—only it is for a while blunted by resentment. You are unacquainted as yet with the artifice of the world, and the arts of this lady in particular, whom you are endeavouring to defend, or at least palliate in the opinion of the Reverend Dr. Allworthy. But if I am anything of a casuist, I can easily discern he will perceive, in whatever you can write or even

say, that it is the lover dictates the letter, and not the sage; it may be a confirming proof of your former regard, but will expose you to the still further commiseration of that kind and good man, giving him indeed a still further and even demonstrable proof of the vileness of her art who could thus, as it were, overthrow such natural good feeling. It is her witchery that has again imposed upon your good sense, and the result will be you will only prove her a still more abandoned woman than you can at present conceive to be possible; and, by your endeavour to save her, you but hasten her destruction. A temporary backsliding you might correct, but in this instance I apprehend you have to do with a perverted mind from an early period of life, which nothing can reclaim, and the grave only can remove the contagion from the face of God's earth,—for immoral she has been, and immoral she will be, to the end of her days, and your endeavouring to reclaim or reform her is only hastening her own ruin, and, it is to be apprehended, your own also."

The last reasoning of Ardent's imaginary debater or internal Mentor (for it is not material who the man of straw was, so long as the subject

is debated *pro et contra* for the information of the public) was so potent as almost to stagger Ardent, enthusiast as he was, in the belief that good could result from his interference with the Reverend Dr. Allworthy's judicious arrangements, and which he had fancied might be too severe, or at all events too decisive, not giving her a chance of reclaiming or reforming herself; for without that Ardent very well knew all that he could say to the reverend divine would be attended with no utility either to the lady or himself. The last argumentation was almost convincing, but not quite; therefore, the idea of the letter again obtruded upon his imagination, and was at last sanctioned by his judgment, weak as it was from inexperience and the previous consequences of seduction.

I will attend to no further cross-questioning or minute examination, said Ardent, mentally, the images of whose mind began to be painful, and the conflicting sentiments too disagreeable when placed in comparison of redeeming his fair enslaver from captivity, as he imagined; for it had already begun to have all the appearance of a romantic legend upon our hero's fertile brain.

Sober reason or wisdom was now little attended to, for in the warlike Captain Racket he fancied he beheld the very counterpart of Major Sturgeon, of glorious memory, who, by marching and countermarching, attacking pig-sties, and other perilous adventures on Hounslow Heath, has rendered himself immortal ; so, in like manner, the worthy captain before named, by his marching, countermining, and storming the fortress of a captive princess, in the wilds of Windsor Forest, is entitled to equal renown, and deserving the plaudits of all posterity for his bravery and deserved celebrity, not only as a warlike character, but the second hero of notoriety in this history ; for when Ardent yielded the post of honour as guardian to this matchless lady's chastity, the captain himself, as a pressed man, entered the service of the fair, and, to do him justice, maintained his post for three weeks, none competing or striving to dispossess him. But a truce with reflections or reflecting upon either public or private character of other imaginary heroes or real ones. It is not now the time to discuss the merits of either. As historian, I am bound to narrate the subject in proper time and

place as they occurred, and not revert backwards and forwards agreeable to the fancy of the imagination, but proceed onwards portraying the peculiar structure of his mind, for Ardent is the most important personage in this drama; and but for his peculiar mode of reasoning, and injudicious conduct in striving to retrieve an irreclaimable woman, the present history had not now been presented to the public, to gratify curiosity or pacify the manes of angry feeling. This is true, Ardent was situated with Mrs. Freelove like another hero of antiquity, called Jack in a wrong box, and was likely to suffer an abundance of ill consequences for his injudicious interference in endeavouring to control the reverend and praiseworthy Dr. Allworthy in his determination to extirpate such gross immorality from the village, where neither himself or any other individual of the male sex could be said to be safe within the precincts of the village boundaries.

It was very naturally to be expected, thought Ardent, that the reverend divine would say she was a sinner, although, perhaps, not a hardened sinner; if she is, my labour is vain, and I shall

write to little purpose, for none can establish absolute wickedness. If there are good parts in her character, they will in part uphold themselves, and, if not, they will find their own level, and in the end be entombed by the grave. This letter is to be the proof, either for conciliating wrath or exasperating the existing information; it is to be the touchstone to her conscience, as it is of feelings in her favour. Is she honest in her professions, or is she not? is now the question at issue. Is she sincere, or is she still determined to act the harlot? will now shortly be proved. Will she be thankful and feel herself obliged to me, or will she not? And will she, in fact, realize my expectations of her, or will she realize the apprehensions of the Reverend Dr. Allworthy?

Now, then, for this letter for the reclaiming of her lost respectability, or restoring to each again a renewal of unhappiness; this letter will prove either the conciliator of human infirmities or the aggravator of previous information—now to begin.

“ To the Reverend Dr. Allworthy,

“ ————— Parsonage.

“ REVEREND SIR,—To be the apologist of a wicked woman, you will say, is wrong,—very wrong indeed. I admit it is, and I know that to be the protector of innocence is praiseworthy.—These are truths too obvious to be insisted upon to a reflecting mind, and need no attempt either to confirm or refute. Then you will think how dare I address you, reverend sir, on the present subject, when I am not advocating the one nor offering protection to the other. Human nature, in the abstract, is neither good nor evil, but a compound of both good and evil; and such being the case, I advocate the cause of fallen human nature, especially if that human nature promises to rise again to its pristine lustre; as such, I am the champion of virtue, although distant and only existing in promise at present. However far off good may be, yet it may be countenanced by the worthy and well-disposed man without disgrace. The character in which I now stand before you is

not as one having committed crime, but as the apologist of a weak infirm being like ourselves, —a woman too, without protection, and who is a candidate for my humanity.

“ Having thus premised the nature of my subject, I have now to adduce reasons and motives for suspending your malediction, which is hanging over the head of a beautiful but unfortunate woman, for it is as a sword pending by a fatal single thread ; and as neither yourself or myself, let us hope, resemble the tyrant Damocles, so we will, if you please, give warning first, before the blow, the irretrievable blow, is struck, which would be the guillotine of her reputation. I have warned her—I have been her prophetic monitor—I have urged her to change her life and character, not only to become respectable herself, but to be likewise an honour to her son, to all which she promises to conform ; I have believed her, and if I have erred, it is from good motives and intentions in trying to save her from an abyss which she seems fully sensible of, and which, unless prevented by myself, is now yawning for her destruction. If she has any portion of reason left,

however small, she will avail herself of the friendly counsel thus risked to save her ; if not, her passions, as the jaws of a monster, will devour her, and, in all human probability, her son will meet with the same fate.

“It now remains for me, reverend sir, to apologize for the apparent want of consistency in my conduct. I know not how far following the dictates of compassion, strengthened by human feelings and a sympathy for her past apparent kindness to myself, will justify my interference in this critical period of her existence, and suspend that blow which is about to annihilate her as a daughter of respectability in this world, and, perhaps, hurry her to an early tomb ; but such is now the consideration between us, and which deserves the utmost deliberation and forbearance on both our parts, lest we overstep the bounds of nature and moderation, in thus depriving a fellow creature of all hope on earth, which may be prolonged by a proper course of conduct, to the advantage of many, and even of some yet unborn. It is awful to contemplate the decrees of Providence to fallen man. She is but a daughter of human infirmity and human weakness, and however she may

have exceeded the bounds of propriety, as concerns our moral obligations in this world to God and ourselves, yet she says her mind has always been with the Almighty, while her affections (too truly spoken, I fear, to be doubted) have been too much engaged with man.

“ It is said, ‘ Open confession is good for the soul,’—I would refer the same commentary to the subject now in debate before us: she says she will reform,—that she will live in future a life truly pious and resigned to Heaven’s will, and no longer mislead her affections by the society of men that are likely to divert her attentions from Divine Providence and his commandments; to which I have replied, ‘ May Heaven prosper you in your attempts to reclaim, not only yourself, but prevent others in future falling into baneful snares, and thus obviate the necessity of their repentance.’ In words like these I have frequently, from time to time, advocated her own cause with herself, and endeavoured to convince her of the enormity of persisting in that conduct which would not only end in her own overthrow, but all connected with her; for such is the awful decree of Divine Providence in his command-

ments, that I believe none can actually transgress without feeling, sooner or later, the pain and inconveniences annexed to the want of obedience to his will and wholesome lessons of instruction, as delivered some centuries since by the wisest of men, and by them communicated to us by tradition from father to son and from mother to daughter, unto the present generation of mankind now existing on the earth.

“ I fear, reverend sir, you will think this a long, prosy, argumentative letter. Nevertheless, as there have been two impulses which induced me to communicate with you—that of resentment, and that of benefitting others by preventing similar ill consequences to those which have so recently befallen myself—I now beg leave to qualify what I have already, perhaps too inconsiderately, communicated, without fully weighing the consequences to the individual complained of; and, as this is a business of high importance to the individual mentioned, as well as to the public at large and to the inhabitants of the village more especially, I request a further communication with you before you place those wheels in motion which are likely to crush our neighbour’s character and reputation

beyond a hope of recovery. There is a justice due to others as well as to ourselves, which I am willing to admit, and, as I think, is likely to be confirmed by your powerful mind, when you do me the favour of reading this part of my letter. I hope I have now anticipated all your objections in a candid manner against suspending your malediction, and, although I am willing to go a great way to prevent your resentment against this hapless woman, which was hastily brought about for the purpose of guarding the village we inhabit from immorality, yet I cannot go every length you may require of me, until I am more firmly convinced in my own mind that she is deserving of being made a sacrifice to principle. As for my own party views or resentments against her, they shall have nothing to do with the destruction that awaits her, and unless stronger motives can be adduced than that she has wronged me, I will never consent to her overthrow, but uphold her to the utmost of my ability, unless I see further reason to be convinced that your estimate of her real character is conclusive.

“ However vacillating you may conceive my conduct to be, reverend sir, whether attributing

it to weakness of mind or my present want of experience in these affairs, I must leave unconsidered for the present ; at all events, I think it impossible but the lady must soon disclose her real character, for, however consummate her artifice may be, yet principle, which has hitherto governed the world, is opposed against her. But should I find her to be the lioness you seem to dread, or the tigress you speak of, I will myself then humbly assist you to remove her from the village, and you may then wield your spiritual artillery against her. Until that time, I will thank you to desist, and wait for that further information which I shall soon have it in my power to yield—for none can reclaim the truly hardened sinner, and events may be soon expected to disclose themselves. How far following the dictates of compassion, strengthened as they are by human sensibilities, for a being once amiable, will excuse me in your opinion, time only can discover ; and, whether or not, I am justified in suspending the malediction of angry feelings, which would annihilate her for ever as a respectable and reputable individual. If I find myself deceived, I

will recall my appeal for your forbearance, and she must then bend to the consequence of her own dissoluteness.

“ With the most sincere respect,

“ I remain,

“ Your sorrowful applicant,

“ R. ARDENT.”

“ *Windsor Forest.*”

CHAPTER XXI.

OUR hero had no sooner sent off his letter to the Reverend Dr. Allworthy, as mentioned in the last chapter, than he felt himself relieved of a considerable weight of responsibility ; for the idea of annihilating the woman he once loved, without giving her a chance of retrieving her lost reputation, was to him so repugnant to every sense of right conduct, that he could not readily fall in, all at once, with the views and sentiments of the reverend personage so frequently alluded to.

“ Thank God !” he was heard to exclaim, “ the letter is gone to the parsonage, and a formidable affair it has been to me, first in interposing, and secondly, in reconciling myself to any interference whatever, after making her conduct deservedly known, to guard others from temptation, and the likelihood of falling into her snares.

“ It is well such perturbations of mind are not of frequent occurrence, or few minds would be found competent to sustain the combat with them.

I shall soon be apprised if gratitude forms any part of her system, or whether I am only the mere tool of her convenience, to fetch and carry like a dog, and her instrument upon every variable tide of appetite, and however disreputable the employment, such as writing this formidable letter for instance, be still her willing slave to be commanded and directed, whether in a good cause or a disgraceful one.

“ Such malleable materials I am not made of; I am not so soft as supposed to be by some, nor so obdurately hard as perchance I am thought by others. I believe I am a compound of a peculiar formation, neither abounding with too much good sense—for that, I think, I have already given demonstrable proofs of—nor burdened, I hope, with too much evil propensity, either in my temper, manners, or other associations. I have hitherto lived to learn, and observed human nature in my progress towards manhood, more so, perhaps, than some have supposed me capable of.

“ When a boy, I was thought to be dull, or at least not so quick as some of the same age, while others thought me only cautious, and my father, who was very fond of his children, and occasion-

ally built his castles in the air, like other parents, would say, my elder brother would make a good lawyer, and myself should be brought up to his own profession, as I was of a philosophical or thinking turn of mind, calculating chances and anticipating events, although I must confess that late events have not quite appeared to verify his prediction."

The debates that Ardent had in his own mind were equalled by the active and intelligent minister, the Reverend Dr. Allworthy, for there can be no doubt but the reverend gentleman was as busy in counterplotting Ardent, as Ardent could be in crossing the intentions of the worthy divine.

It was thus that two medical characters, each of worth, and some judgment in their way, were engaged in directly opposite pursuits and mental reflections upon the comparative advantage and disadvantage of countenancing or discountenancing a lady of Mrs. Freelove's principles and practice.

They were each eliciting great and important truths—the one theoretically, and the other practically—on moral principles and causes, or rather the developing of that mind, not very easily com-

prehended by Ardent, but foreseen by his clerical friend and adviser.

These two friends and well-wishers of each other were of opposite opinions and contradictory sentiments, as related to this frail lady ; the young man not wishing to abandon his former mistress to despair, and the worthy pastor of the village flock dreading, as a shepherd, the vicinity of such a wolf to his fold, which apprehension was founded on the evident distress and inconvenience she had produced on the mind of Ardent ; besides, others had to dread a similar fate, or ill consequence to their mental peace and worldly prospects.

The reverend clergyman, upon the receipt of Ardent's letter, resolved to call upon him, thinking a personal conference to be infinitely preferable to letter-writing ; and having found him at home, began his expostulation in the following manner :

“ I have taken more trouble in this affair, Mr. Ardent, than is usual with me, to convince you of your indiscretion, and how much you are in error.

“ You have, by your letter, disarmed me completely from proceeding against this woman, as

I intended, and depend on it, the consequence of your indiscretion will fall upon yourself. You know not the person you are interested in: she is a woman of art beyond your power of control, or even comprehension. But my mind is completely made up upon the subject. She can be no longer a patroness of the Sunday School; it was my wish to have banished her completely from the village, but you have prevented it,—you are infatuated, and I think a lost young man, unless you speedily reform.

“ Did you ever read the play of George Barnwell?”

“ I cannot say I ever did, Dr. Allworthy, neither have I ever seen it performed, but since you have excited my curiosity, I will very soon be possessed of it.”

“ Purchase it, and read it attentively, and in the character of Milwood you will see Mrs. Freelove, and your own character in that of George Barnwell.”

“ I thank you for your information, and will read it with that attention you think it merits.”

“ Sir,” said the Divine (shrugging up his shoulders, as if with horror), was this woman dis-

tressed, and your own means not adequate to the supply of her wants, she could persuade you to rob on the highway.”

“Nay, sir, now you are going quite into an extreme; I believe myself foolish enough to perform some inconsistent acts for her welfare, and yet not sacrifice my principles so entirely as you think me capable of doing. It is true, I have been excessively fond her, and more than I can or shall be again, and have had more anxiety on her account than I wish to have in future. If I do not mistake my motive, it was, as I expressed in my letter, to afford her the opportunity of once again reforming before it is too late, and give her a little longer time to alter her conduct, that we may have nothing to upbraid ourselves with hereafter, let the subsequent consequences be what they may; and I fear they will be disagreeable enough, without our anticipating her fall, and hurling her headlong down the precipice of destruction.

“Precipitancy of accusation, and precipitancy of judgment and condemnation, widely differ, and as we would like to be forewarned of the approach of an impending calamity, so in like manner I crave, as an act of justice to this defenceless

woman, that she should receive from our hands the same indulgence ;—consider, Sir, as she says of herself, she is a lone woman, an unprotected female. She has appealed to me, and I have yielded to her wishes, by stopping for the present, as far as I can, the hand of fate, or arresting its descent upon her guilty conduct for a short time. And as to my being capable of such great excess, had she been necessitous as you assert, I beg leave to differ from you very essentially, for it would not only imply I had a very weak mind, but a very vicious one.

“ My regard for her proceeds from a feeling of good-nature, and some remains of gallantry still in my composition, which I find it very difficult to divest myself of; call me rather her knight errant, or recreant knight, than a destroyer of others, either in person or estate, to support her. I have given her this opportunity of altering her sentiments and opinions, that I may be convinced of her gratitude, but as to her love, that I do not want,—it is too painful to be borne with to any honourable mind, particularly if shackled with such conditions as heretofore have been extorted from me, admitting neither of peace nor tranquillity.

“ Our mistake arose from our objects being widely different. She, it seems, was looking after a gallant at the time I was in search of a wife, and had I attended to my father’s recommendation, I should now have been a happy man ; as it is, it may not be too late, but some how or other, this lady interposed, and prevented an attachment from taking place.

“ It is impossible, reverend sir, that this lady and myself can be of a uniformity of opinion, unless she alters very much, as she has a tendency to vicious courses, and I have been upon most occasions as obstinately opposing her, which is the source of all our disquietudes. Besides, her ample income precludes the possibility of supposing that she is ever likely to become so necessitous, as to require any aid of that description from myself, and however much I may have been influenced by passion, I shudder at the thought of such an awful vice as you have mentioned. That I am inclined to think more favourably of her than she deserves, is very probable, but still I think her to be possessed of many good traits of character, and I hope enough to save her from ruin ; but however, time will disclose ; she is now on the verge of the

precipice,—one step more, and she is a lost woman.”

“ Did you ever read Foote’s farces, Ardent ?”

“ I have not, Sir.”

“ Then read them : you will find her piety resembles Mother Cole’s, in the Minor—piety and wh***dom blended together, which is not acceptable before God.”

“ If I find her as you say, Sir, I will have no farther conversation with her ; I am more than half convinced, your judgment is correct.”

“ Your letter, Sir, is drawn up with great art, and has fully answered the purpose you designed it should, that of suspending my operations against her ; yet, Sir, I will be so far friendly with you, as to give you my last counsel, which is this, you have judged ill betwixt this woman and the public. Myself knowing more of the world than yourself, will predict disgrace awaits her, and will in the end extend to yourself, by implicating you in the same vortex. Leave her house, and never more cross her threshold. Look into the fifth chapter of Proverbs for her character ; the harlot is there well described,—you have swallowed the bait, she has persuaded you she is religious, and she will hurl you to destruction.”

“Her repentance is all a sham,—such women never repent, but repent to sin over again;—they never alter at her age—sin has got fast hold of her, and herself, a woman of the most consummate art, laughs all seriousness to scorn.

“Mischief is her delight—your immortal soul is at hazard—turn from the house of this frail woman, and have more respect for yourself in future. I now leave you: if you follow not my counsel, you will repent. You are incapable of judging for yourself,—seek for a wife, and follow your father’s counsel, that your days may be happy and long in the land, and think no more of this crafty woman. I now leave you to your reflection.”—And so saying, the worthy gentleman took his leave of our perplexed hero.

The author again comes forward, as he learns from unquestionable authority the drama of George Barnwell is fairly worn out in the public estimation, that it is wholly discarded from the boards of Drury Lane and Covent Garden, as an old song.

The public taste is improved of late, and requires works higher seasoned, or still more extraordinary.

What does this prove, but that the march of intellect is too far advanced to be pleased with such

plain narration of unadorned facts, or ideal fiction, as would in the opinion of some individuals be beneath a pot-boy's intellect of the present age; indeed, so early is now the initiation into vice in the rising generation, as to endanger the total overthrow of all serious truths in a few years. Mention Millwood to a pot-boy or an apprentice of the present day, and he would laugh at you. Any apprentice-boy would feel his vanity piqued at the supposition that they were ignorant of such characters, when the chief business of life, in their estimation, is to follow every ill conduct set them by such depraved beings, animated as they are by their fellow delinquents in the like depravity of vice and licentiousness; imitating, as they do, the example set them by the majority of their betters, which the author would feel happy if these volumes could in any way control.

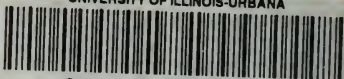
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